ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Number 34

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The Adventure of the Three R's	ELLERY QUEEN
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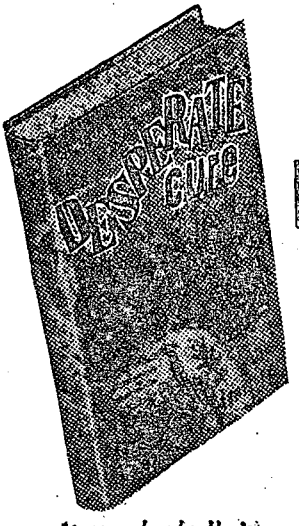

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The first full-length study of the detective story to appear in the English language was H. Douglas Thomson's MASTERS OF MYSTERY, *published in London by Wm. Collins Sons in 1931. The second full-length study of "the life and times of the detective story" was written by an American, and we are happy to record in print that this second study is infinitely superior to the first in every way; of course, we refer to Howard Haycraft's* MURDER FOR PLEASURE, *published by D. Appleton-Century in 1941.*

It is interesting to go back into Mr. Thomson's book and occasionally check some of his critical opinions. For example, what did Mr. Thomson have to say about Dashiell Hammett fifteen years ago? Exactly three sentences. We quote: "Sam Spade, the ex-Pinkerton man of Mr. Dashiel [sic] Hammett's THE MALTESE FALCON, THE DAIN CURSE *and* RED HARVEST, *is an honest-to-goodness, 100 per cent. American detective."*

That was Mr. Thomson's first sentence. If he had stopped there, no one could really quarrel with his appraisal of Sam Spade. But it was Mr. Thomson's second sentence that upset the critical apple-cart — that second sentence is a "killer"! We quote: "There does not appear to be much more than this to commend him." And that summary judgment by Mr. Thomson was delivered, remember, after he had read THE MALTESE FALCON!

An acute critic on other matters of detectival discernment, Mr. Thomson obviously missed the boat on Hammett's true importance in the genre. Perhaps Mr. Hammett is too *American. . . .*[1]

THE MAIN DEATH

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

THE captain told me Hacken and Begg were handling the job. I caught them leaving the detectives' assembly room. Begg was a freckled heavyweight, as friendly as a Saint Bernard puppy, but less intelligent. Lanky detective-sergeant Hacken, not so playful, carried the team's brains behind his worried hatchet face.

"In a hurry?" I inquired.

"Always in a hurry when we're quitting for the day," Begg said, grinning.

"What do you want?" Hacken asked.

"I want the low-down on the Main doings — if any."

"You going to work on it?"

"Yes," I said, "for Main's boss — Gungen."

"Then you can tell us something. Why'd he have the twenty thou in cash?"

[1] Mr. Thomson's third sentence was noncritical: he merely stated that "Mr. Hammett is himself an ex-Pinkerton man."

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"Tell you in the morning," I promised. "I haven't seen Gungen yet. Got a date with him tonight."

While we talked we had gone into the assembly room, with its schoolroom arrangement of desks and benches. Half a dozen police detectives were scattered among them, doing reports. We three sat around Hacken's desk and the lanky detective-sergeant talked:

"Main got home from Los Angeles at eight, Sunday night, with twenty thousand in his wallet. He'd gone down there to sell something for Gungen. He told his wife he had driven up from L. A. with a friend — no name. She went to bed around ten-thirty, leaving him reading. He had the money — two hundred hundred-dollar bills — in a brown wallet.

"So far, so good. He's in the living-room reading. She's in the bedroom sleeping. Just the two of them in the apartment. A racket wakes her. She jumps out of bed, runs into the living-room. There's Main wrestling with a couple of men. One's tall and husky. The other's little — kind of girlish built. Both have got black handkerchiefs over their mugs and caps pulled down.

"When Mrs. Main shows, the little one breaks away from Main and sticks her up. Puts a gun in Mrs. Main's face and tells her to behave. Main and the other guy are still scuffling. Main has got his gun in his hand, but the thug has him by the wrist, trying to twist it. He makes it pretty soon — Main drops the rod. The thug flashes his own, holding Main off while he bends down to pick up the one that fell.

"When the man stoops, Main piles on him. He manages to knock the fellow's gun out of his hand, but by that time the fellow had got the one on the floor — the one Main had dropped. They're heaped up there for a couple of seconds. Mrs. Main can't see what's happening. Then bang! Main's falling away, his vest burning where the shot had set fire to it, a bullet in his heart, his gun smoking in the masked guy's fist. Mrs. Main passes out.

"When she comes to there's nobody in the apartment but herself and her dead husband. His wallet's gone, and so is his gun. She was unconscious for about half an hour. We know that, because other people heard the shot and could give us the time — even if they didn't know where it came from.

"The Mains' apartment is on the sixth floor. It's an eight-story building. Next door to it, on the corner of Eighteenth Avenue, is a two-story building — grocery downstairs, grocer's flat upstairs. Behind these buildings runs a narrow back street — an alley. All right.

"Kinney — the patrolman on that beat — was walking down Eighteenth Avenue. He heard the shot. It was clear to him, because the Mains' apartment is on that side of the building — the side overlooking the grocer's — but Kinney couldn't place it right away. He wasted time scouting around up the street. By the time he got down as far as the alley in his

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hunting, the birds had flown. Kinney found signs of 'em though — they had dropped a gun in the alley — the gun they'd taken from Main and shot him with. But Kinney didn't see 'em — didn't see anybody who might have been them.

"Now, from a hall window of the apartment house's third floor to the roof of the grocer's building is easy going. Anybody but a cripple could make it — in or out — and the window's never locked. From the grocer's roof to the back street is almost as easy. There's a cast iron pipe, a deep window, a door with heavy hinges sticking out — a regular ladder up and down that back wall. Begg and I did it without working up a sweat. The pair could have gone in that way. We know they left that way. On the grocer's roof we found Main's wallet — empty, of course — and a handkerchief. The wallet had metal corners. The handkerchief had caught on one of 'em, and went with it when the crooks tossed it away."

"Main's handkerchief?"

"A woman's — with an E in one corner."

"Mrs. Main's?"

"Her name is Agnes," Hacken said. "We showed her the wallet, the gun, and the handkerchief. She identified the first two as her husband's, but the handkerchief was a new one on her. However, she could give us the name of the perfume on it — *Désir du Cœur*. And — with it for a guide — she said the smaller of the masked pair could have been a woman. She had already described him as kind of girlish built."

"Any fingerprints, or the like?" I asked.

"No. Phels went over the apartment, the window, the roof, the wallet and the gun. Not a smear."

"Mrs. Main identify 'em?"

"She says she'd know the little one. Maybe she would."

"Got anything on the who?"

"Not yet," the lanky detective-sergeant said as we moved toward the door.

In the street I left the police sleuths and set out for Bruno Gungen's home in Westwood Park.

The dealer in rare and antique jewelry was a little bit of a man and a fancy one. His dinner jacket was corset-tight around his waist, padded high and sharp at the shoulders. Hair, mustache and spade-shaped goatee were dyed black and greased until they were as shiny as his pointed pink finger-nails. I wouldn't bet a cent that the color in his fifty-year-old cheeks wasn't rouge.

He came out of the depths of a leather library chair to give me a soft, warm hand that was no larger than a child's, bowing and smiling at me with his head tilted to one side.

Then he introduced me to his wife, who bowed without getting up from her seat at the table. Apparently she was a little more than a third of his age. She couldn't have been a day over nineteen, and she looked more like sixteen. She was as small as he, with a dimpled olive-skinned face,

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round brown eyes, a plump painted mouth and the general air of an expensive doll in a toy-store window.

Bruno Gungen explained to her at some length that I was connected with the Continental Detective Agency, and that he had employed me to help the police find Jeffrey Main's murderers and recover the stolen twenty thousand dollars.

She murmured, "Oh, yes!" in a tone that said she was not the least bit interested, and stood up, saying, "Then I'll leave you to —"

"No, no, my dear!" Her husband was waving his pink fingers at her. "I would have no secrets from you."

His ridiculous little face jerked around to me, cocked itself sidewise, and he asked, with a little giggle:

"Is not that so? That between husband and wife there should be no secrets?"

I pretended I agreed with him.

"You, I know, my dear," he addressed his wife, who had sat down again, "are as much interested in this as I, for did we not have an equal affection for dear Jeffrey? Is it not so?"

She repeated, "Oh, yes!" with the same lack of interest.

Her husband turned to me and said, "Now?" encouragingly.

"I've seen the police," I told him. "Is there anything you can add to their story? Anything new?"

He whisked his face around toward his wife.

"Is there, Enid, dear?"

"I know of nothing," she replied.

He giggled and made a delighted face at me.

"That is it," he said. "We know of nothing."

"He came back to San Francisco eight o'clock Sunday night — three hours before he was killed and robbed — with twenty thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills. What was he doing with it?"

"It was the proceeds of a sale to a customer," Bruno Gungen explained. "Mr. Nathaniel Ogilvie, of Los Angeles."

"But why cash?"

The little man's painted face screwed itself up into a shrewd leer.

"A bit of hanky-panky," he confessed complacently, "a trick of the trade, as one says. You know the genus collector? Ah, there is a study for you! Observe. I obtain a golden tiara of early Grecian workmanship, or let me be correct — purporting to be of early Grecian workmanship, purporting also to have been found in Southern Russia, near Odessa. Whether there is any truth in either of these suppositions I do not know, but certainly the tiara is a thing of beauty."

He giggled.

"Now I have a client, a Mr. Nathaniel Ogilvie, of Los Angeles, who has an appetite for curios of the sort — a very devil of a *cacoethes carpendi*. The value of these items, you will comprehend, is exactly what one can get for them — no more, little less. This tiara — now ten thousand dollars is the least I could have expected

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for it, if sold as one sells an ordinary article of the sort. But can one call a golden cap made long ago for some forgotten Scythian king an ordinary article of any sort? No! No! So, swaddled in cotton, intricately packed, Jeffrey carries this tiara to Los Angeles to show our Mr. Ogilvie.

"In what manner the tiara came into our hands Jeffrey will not say. But he will hint at devious intrigues, smuggling, a little of violence and lawlessness here and there, the necessity for secrecy. For your true collector, there is the bait! Nothing is anything to him except as it is difficultly come by. Jeffrey will not lie. No! *Mon Dieu*, that would be dishonest, despicable! But he will suggest much, and he will refuse, oh, so emphatically! to take a check for the tiara. No check, my dear sir! Nothing which may be traced! Cash moneys!

"Hanky-panky, as you see. But where is the harm? Mr. Ogilvie is certainly going to buy the tiara, and our little deceit simply heightens his pleasure in his purchase. Besides, who is to say that this tiara is not authentic? If it is, then these things Jeffrey suggests are indubitably true. Mr. Ogilvie does buy it, for twenty thousand dollars, and that is why poor Jeffrey had in his possession so much cash money."

"Did you hear from Main after he got back?" I asked.

The dealer smiled as if my question tickled him, turning his head so that the smile was directed at his wife.

"Did we, Enid, darling?" he passed on the question.

She pouted and shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"The first we knew he had returned," Gungen interpreted these gestures to me, "was Monday morning, when we heard of his death. Is it not so, my dove?"

His dove murmured, "Yes," and left her chair, saying, "You'll excuse me? I have a letter to write."

"Certainly, my dear," Gungen told her as he and I stood up.

She passed close to him on her way to the door. His small nose twitched over his dyed mustache and he rolled his eyes in a caricature of ecstasy.

"What a delightful scent, my precious!" he exclaimed. "What a heavenly odor! Has it a name, my love?"

"Yes," she said, pausing in the doorway, not looking back.

"And it is?"

"*Désir du Cœur*," she replied over her shoulder as she left us.

Bruno Gungen looked at me and giggled.

I sat down again and asked him what he knew about Jeffrey Main.

"Everything, no less," he assured me. "For a dozen years, since he was a boy of eighteen he has been my right eye, my right hand."

"Well, what sort of man was he?"

Bruno Gungen showed me his pink palms side by side.

"What sort is any man?" he asked over them.

That didn't mean anything to me, so I kept quiet, waiting.

"I shall tell you," the little man

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began presently. "Jeffrey had the eye and the taste for this traffic of mine. No man living save myself alone has a judgment in these matters which I would prefer to Jeffrey's. And, honest, mind you! Let nothing I say mislead you on that point. Never a lock have I to which Jeffrey had not also the key, and might have it forever, if he had lived so long.

"But there is a but. In his private life, rascal is a word that only does him justice. He drank, he gambled, he loved, he spent — dear God, how he spent! With moderation he had nothing to do. Of the moneys he got by inheritance, of the fifty thousand dollars or more his wife had when they were married, there is no remainder. Fortunately, he was well insured — else his wife would have been left penniless. Oh, he was a true Heliogabalus, that fellow!"

Bruno Gungen went down to the front door with me when I left. I said, "Good night," and walked down the gravel path to where I had left my car. The night was clear, dark, moonless. High hedges were black walls on both sides of the Gungen place. To the left there was a barely noticeable hole in the blackness — a dark-gray hole — oval — the size of a face.

I got into my car, stirred up the engine and drove away. Into the first cross-street I turned, parked the machine, and started back toward Gungen's afoot. I was curious about that face-size oval.

When I reached the corner, I saw a woman coming toward me from the direction of Gungen's. I was in the shadow of a wall. Cautiously, I backed away from the corner until I came to a gate with brick buttresses sticking out. I made myself flat between them.

The woman crossed the street, went on up the driveway, toward the car-line. I couldn't make out anything about her. Maybe she was coming from Gungen's grounds, maybe not. Maybe it was her face I had seen against the hedge, maybe not. It was a heads or tails proposition. I guessed yes and tailed her up the drive.

Her destination was a drugstore on the car line. Her business there was with the telephone. She spent ten minutes at it. I didn't go into the store to try for an earful, but stayed on the other side of the street, contenting myself with a good look at her.

She was a girl of about twenty-five, medium in height, chunky in build, with pale gray eyes that had little pouches under them, a thick nose and a prominent lower lip. She had no hat over her brown hair. Her body was wrapped in a blue cape.

From the drugstore I shadowed her back to the Gungen house. She went in the back door. A servant, probably, but not the maid who had opened the door for me earlier in the evening.

I returned to my car, drove back to town, to the office.

"Is Dick Foley working on anything?" I asked Fiske, who sits on the Continental Detective Agency's affairs at night.

"No. Did you ever hear the story about the fellow who had his neck

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operated on?"

With the slightest encouragement, Fiske is good for a dozen stories without a stop, so I said:

"Yes. Get hold of Dick and tell him I've got a shadow job out Westwood Park way for him to start on in the morning."

I gave Fiske — to be passed on to Dick — Gungen's address and a description of the girl who had done the phoning from the drugstore. Then I escaped to my own office, where I composed and coded a telegram to our Los Angeles branch, asking that Main's recent visit to that city be dug into.

The next morning Hacken and Begg dropped in to see me and I gave them Gungen's version of why the twenty thousand had been in cash. The police detectives told me a stool-pigeon had brought them word that Bunky Dahl — a local guerrilla who did a moderate business in hijacking — had been flashing a roll since about the time of Main's death.

"We haven't picked him up yet," Hacken said. "Haven't been able to place him, but we've got a line on his girl. Course, he might have got his dough somewhere else."

At ten o'clock that morning I had to go over to Oakland to testify against a couple of flimflammers who had sold bushels of stock in a sleight-of-hand rubber manufacturing business. When I got back to the Agency, at six that evening, I found a wire from Los Angeles on my desk.

Jeffrey Main, the wire told me, had finished his business with Ogilvie Saturday afternoon, had checked out of his hotel immediately, and had left on the Owl that evening, which would have put him in San Francisco early Sunday morning. The hundred-dollar bills with which Ogilvie had paid for the tiara had been new ones, consecutively numbered, and Ogilvie's bank had given the Los Angeles operative the numbers.

Before I quit for the day, I phoned Hacken, gave him these numbers as well as the other dope.

"Haven't found Dahl yet," he told me.

Dick Foley's report came in the next morning. The girl had left the Gungen house at 9:15 the previous night, had gone to the corner of Miramar Avenue and Southwood Drive, where a man was waiting for her in a Buick coupe. Dick described him: age about 30; height about five feet ten; slender, weight about 140; medium complexion; brown hair and eyes; long, thin face with pointed chin; brown hat, suit and shoes and gray overcoat.

The girl got into the car with him and they drove out to the beach, along the Great Highway for a little while, and then back to Miramar and Southwood, where the girl got out. She seemed to be going back to the house, so Dick let her go and tailed the man in the Buick down to the Futurity Apartments in Mason Street.

The man stayed in there for half an hour or so and then came out with an-

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other man and two women. This second man was of about the same age as the first, about five feet eight inches tall, would weigh about a hundred and seventy pounds, had brown hair and eyes, a dark complexion, a flat, broad face with high cheek bones, and wore a blue suit, gray hat, tan overcoat, black shoes, and a pearl tie-pin.

One of the women was about twenty-two years old, small, slender and blonde. The other was probably three or four years older, red-haired, medium in height and build.

The quartet had got in the car and gone to the Algerian Café, where they had stayed until a little after one in the morning. Then they had returned to the Futurity Apartments. At half-past three the two men had left, driving the Buick to a garage in Post Street, and then walking to the Mars Hotel.

When I had finished reading this I called Mickey Linehan in from the operatives' room, gave him the report and instructions:

"Find out who these folks are."

Mickey went out. My phone rang.

Bruno Gungen: "Good morning. May you have something to tell me today?"

"Maybe," I said. "I'll be in to see you this afternoon."

At noon Mickey Linehan returned. "The first bloke," he reported, "the one Dick saw with the girl, is named Benjamin Weel. He owns the Buick and lives in the Mars — room 410. He's a salesman, though it's not known what of. The other man is a friend of his who has been staying with him for a couple of days. I couldn't get anything on him. He's not registered. The two women in the Futurity are a couple of hustlers. They live in apartment 303. The larger one goes by the name of Mrs. Effie Roberts. The little blonde is Violet Evarts."

"Wait," I told Mickey, and went back into the file room, to the index-card drawers.

I ran through the W's — *Weel, Benjamin, alias Coughing Ben, 36,312W.*

The contents of folder No. 36,312W told me that Coughing Ben Weel had been arrested in Amador County in 1916 on a highgrading charge and had been sent to San Quentin for three years. In 1922 he had been picked up again in Los Angeles and charged with trying to blackmail a movie actress, but the case had fallen through. His description fit the one Dick had given of the man in the Buick. His photograph — a copy of the one taken by the Los Angeles police in '22 — showed a sharp-featured young man with a chin like a wedge.

I took the photo back to Mickey.

"This is Weel five years ago. Follow him around a while."

When the operative had gone I called the police detective bureau. Neither Hacken nor Begg was in. I got hold of Lewis, in the identification department.

"What does Bunky Dahl look like?" I asked him.

"Wait a minute," Lewis said, and then: "32, 67½, 174, medium, brown, brown, broad flat face with prominent

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cheek-bones, gold bridgework in lower left jaw, brown mole under right ear, deformed little toe on right foot."

"Have you a picture of him to spare?"

"Sure."

"Thanks, I'll send a boy down for it."

I told Tommy Howd to go down and get it, and then went out for some food. After luncheon I went up to Gungen's establishment in Post Street. The little dealer was gaudier than ever this afternoon in a black coat that was even more padded in the shoulders and tighter in the waist than his dinner coat had been the other night, striped gray pants, a vest that leaned toward magenta, and a billowy satin tie embroidered with gold thread.

We went back through his store, up a narrow flight of stairs to a small cube of an office.

"And now you have to tell me?" he asked when we were seated, with the door closed.

"I've got more to ask than tell. First, who is the girl with the thick nose, the thick lower lip, and the pouches under gray eyes, who lives in your house?"

"That is one Rose Rubury." His little painted face was wrinkled in a satisfied smile. "She is my dear wife's maid."

"She goes riding with an ex-convict."

"She does?" He stroked his dyed goatee with a pink hand, highly pleased. "Well, she is my dear wife's maid, that she is."

"Main didn't drive up from Los Angeles with a friend, as he told his wife. He came up on the train Saturday night — so he was in town twelve hours before he showed up at home."

Bruno Gungen giggled, cocking his delighted face to one side.

"Ah!" he tittered. "We progress! We progress! Is it not so?"

"Maybe. Do you remember if this Rose Rubury was in the house on Sunday night — say from eleven to twelve?"

"I do remember. She was. I know it certainly. My dear wife was not feeling well that night. My darling had gone out early that Sunday morning, saying she was going to drive out into the country with some friends — what friends I do not know. But she came home at eight o'clock that night complaining of a distressing headache. I was quite frightened by her appearance, so that I went often to see how she was, and thus it happens that I know her maid was in the house all of that night, until one o'clock, at least."

"Did the police show you the handkerchief they found with Main's wallet?"

"Yes." He squirmed on the edge of his chair, his face like the face of a kid looking at a Christmas tree.

"You're sure it's your wife's?"

His giggle interfered with his speech, so he said, "Yes," by shaking his head up and down until the goatee seemed to be a black whiskbroom brushing his tie.

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"She could have left it at the Mains' some time when she was visiting Mrs. Main," I suggested.

"That is not possible," he corrected me eagerly. "My darling and Mrs. Main are not acquainted."

"But your wife and Main were acquainted?"

He giggled and brushed his tie with his whisker again.

"How well acquainted?"

He shrugged his padded shoulders.

"I know not," he said merrily. "I employ a detective."

"Yeah?" I scowled at him. "You employ this one to find out who killed and robbed Main — and for nothing else. If you think you're employing him to dig up your family secrets, you're as wrong as Prohibition."

"But why? But why?" He was flustered. "Have I not the right to know? There will be no trouble over it, no scandal, no divorce suing, of that be assured. Even Jeffrey is dead, so it is what one calls ancient history. While he lived I knew nothing, was blind. After he died I saw certain things. For my own satisfaction — that is all, I beg you to believe — I should like to know with certainty."

"You won't get it out of me," I said bluntly. "I don't know anything about it except what you've told me, and you can't hire me to go further into it. Besides, if you're not going to do anything about it, why don't you keep your hands off — let it sleep?"

"No, no, my friend." He had recovered his bright-eyed cheerfulness. "I am not an old man, but I am fifty-two. My dear wife is eighteen, and a truly lovely person." He giggled. "This thing happened. May it not happen again? And would it not be the part of husbandly wisdom to have — shall I say — a hold on her? A rein? A check? Or if it never happen again, still might not one's dear wife be the more docile for certain information which her husband possesses?"

"It's your business." I stood up, laughing. "But I don't want any part of it."

"Ah, do not let us quarrel!" He jumped up and took one of my hands in his. "If you will not, you will not. But there remains the criminal aspect of the situation — the aspect that has engaged you thus far. You will fulfil your engagement there? Surely?"

"Suppose — just suppose — it should turn out that your wife had a hand in Main's death. What then?"

"That" — he shrugged, holding his hands out, palms up — "would be a matter for the law."

"Good enough. I'll stick — if you understand that you're entitled to no information except what touches your 'criminal aspect.'"

"Excellent! And if it so happens you cannot separate my darling from that —"

I nodded. He grabbed my hand again, patting it. I took it away from him and returned to the Agency.

A memorandum on my desk asked me to phone detective-sergeant Hacken. I did.

"Bunky Dahl wasn't in on the Main job," the hatchet-faced man told me.

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"He and a pal named Coughing Ben Weel were putting on a party in a road-house near Vellejo that night. They were there from around ten until they were thrown out after two in the morning for starting a row. It's on the up-and-up. The guy that gave it to me is right — and I got a check-up on it from two others."

I thanked Hacken and phoned Gungen's residence, asking for Mrs. Gungen, asking her if she would see me.

"Oh, yes," she said. It seemed to be her favorite expression.

Putting the photos of Dahl and Weel in my pocket, I got a taxi and set out for Westwood Park. Using Fatima-smoke on my brains while I rode, I concocted a wonderful series of lies to be told my client's wife — a series that I thought would get me the information I wanted.

A hundred and fifty yards or so up the drive from the house I saw Dick Foley's car standing.

A thin, pasty-faced maid opened the Gungens' door and took me into a sitting room on the second floor, where Mrs. Gungen put down a copy of *The Sun Also Rises* and waved a cigarette at a nearby chair. She was very much the expensive doll this afternoon in a Persian orange dress, sitting with one foot tucked under her.

Looking at her while I lighted a cigarette, remembering my first interview with her and her husband, and my second one with him, I decided to chuck the tale-of-woe I had spent my ride building.

"You've a maid — Rose Rubury," I began. "I don't want her to hear what's said."

She said, "Very well," without the least sign of surprise, added, "Excuse me a moment," and left her chair and the room.

Presently she was back, sitting down with both feet tucked under her now.

"She will be away for at least half an hour."

"That will be long enough. This Rose is friendly with an ex-convict named Weel."

The doll face frowned, and the plump painted lips pressed themselves together. I waited, giving her time to say something. She didn't say it. I took Weel's and Dahl's pictures out and held them out to her.

"The thin-faced one is your Rose's friend. The other's a pal of his — also a crook."

She took the photographs with a tiny hand that was as steady as mine, and looked at them carefully. Her mouth became smaller and tighter, her brown eyes darker. Then, slowly, her face cleared, she murmured, "Oh, yes," and returned the pictures to me.

"When I told your husband about it" — I spoke deliberately — "he said, 'she's my wife's maid,' and laughed. What did he mean by that?"

"How should I know?" she sighed.

"You know your handkerchief was found with Main's empty wallet." I dropped this in a by-the-way tone, pretending to be chiefly occupied putting cigarette ash in a jasper tray.

"Oh, yes," she said wearily, "I've been told that."

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"How do you think it happened?"

"I can't imagine."

"I can," I said, "but I'd rather know positively. Mrs. Gungen, it would save a lot of time if we could talk plain language."

"Why not?" she asked listlessly. "You are in my husband's confidence, have his permission to question me. If it happens to be humiliating to me — well, after all, I am only his wife. And it is hardly likely that any new indignities either of you can devise will be worse than those to which I have already submitted."

I grunted at this theatrical speech and went ahead.

"Mrs. Gungen, I'm only interested in learning who robbed and killed Main. Anything that points in that direction is valuable to me, but only in so far as it points in that direction. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Certainly," she said. "I understand you are in my husband's employ."

That got us nowhere. I tried again:

"What impression do you suppose I got the other evening, when I was here?"

"Doubtless" — she smiled faintly — "you got the impression that my husband thought I had been Jeffrey's mistress."

"Well?"

"Are you" — her dimples showed; she seemed amused — "asking me if I really was his mistress?"

"No — though of course I'd like to know."

"Naturally you would," she said pleasantly.

"What impression did you get that evening?" I asked.

"I?" She wrinkled her forehead. "Oh, that my husband had hired you to prove that I had been Jeffrey's mistress." She repeated the word mistress as if she liked the shape of it.

"You were wrong."

"Knowing my husband, I find that hard to believe."

"Knowing myself, I'm sure of it," I insisted. "There's no uncertainty about it between your husband and me, Mrs. Gungen. It is understood that my job is to find who stole and killed — nothing else."

"Really?" It was a polite ending of an argument of which she had grown tired.

"You're tying my hands," I complained, standing up, pretending I wasn't watching her carefully. "I can't do anything now but grab this Rose Rubury and the two men and see what I can squeeze out of them. You said the girl would be back in half an hour?"

She looked at me steadily with her round brown eyes.

"She should be back in a few minutes. You're going to question her?"

"But not here," I informed her. "I'll take her down to the Hall of Justice and have the men picked up. Can I use your phone?"

"Certainly. It's in the next room." She crossed to open the door for me.

I called Davenport 20 and asked for the detective bureau.

Mrs. Gungen, standing in the sit-

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ting room, said, so softly I could barely hear it:

"Wait."

Holding the phone, I turned to look through the door at her. She was pinching her red mouth between thumb and finger, frowning. I didn't put down the phone until she took the hand from her mouth and held it out toward me. Then I went back into the sitting-room.

I was on top. I kept my mouth shut. It was up to her to make the plunge.

"I won't pretend I trust you." She spoke hesitantly, half as if to herself. "You're working for my husband, and even the money would not interest him so much as whatever I had done. It's a choice of evils — certain on the one hand, more than probable on the other."

She stopped talking and rubbed her hands together. Her round eyes were becoming indecisive.

"There's only the two of us," I urged her. "You can deny everything afterward. It's my word against yours. If you don't tell me — I know now I can get it from the others. Your calling me from the phone lets me know that. You think I'll tell your husband everything. Well, if I have to fry it out of the others, he'll probably read it all in the papers. Your one chance is to trust me."

A half-minute of silence.

"Suppose," she whispered, "I should pay you to ——"

"What for? If I'm going to tell your husband, I could take your money and still tell him, couldn't I?"

Her red mouth curved, her dimples appeared and her eyes brightened.

"That is reassuring," she said. "I shall tell you. Jeffrey came back from Los Angeles early so we could have the day together in a little apartment we kept. In the afternoon two men came in — with a key. They had revolvers. They robbed Jeffrey of the money. That was what they had come for. They seemed to know all about it and about us. They taunted us with threats of the story they would tell if we had them arrested.

"We couldn't do anything after they had gone. It was a ridiculously hopeless plight they had put us in. There wasn't anything we could do — since we couldn't possibly replace the money. Jeffrey couldn't even pretend he had lost it or had been robbed of it while he was alone. His secret early return to San Francisco would have been sure to throw suspicion on him. Jeffrey lost his head. He wanted me to run away with him. Then he wanted to go to my husband and tell him the truth. I wouldn't permit either course — they were equally foolish.

"We left the apartment, separating, a little after seven. We weren't, the truth is, on the best of terms by then. He wasn't — now that we were in trouble — as —— No, I shouldn't say that."

She stopped and stood looking at me with a placid doll's face.

"The pictures I showed you are the two men?" I asked.

"Yes."

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"This maid of yours knew about you and Main? Knew about the apartment? Knew about his trip to Los Angeles and his plan to return early with the cash?"

"I can't say she did. But she certainly could have learned most of it by spying and eavesdropping and looking through my — I had a note from Jeffrey telling me about the Los Angeles trip, making the appointment for Sunday morning. Perhaps she could have seen it. I'm careless."

"I'm going now," I said. "Sit tight till you hear from me. And don't scare up the maid."

From the Gungen house I went direct to the Mars Hotel. Mickey Linehan was sitting behind a newspaper in a corner of the lobby.

"They in?" I asked him.

"Yep."

"Let's go up and see them."

Mickey rattled his knuckles on door number 410. A metallic voice asked: "Who's there?"

"Package," Mickey replied in what was meant for a boy's voice.

A slender man with a pointed chin opened the door. I gave him a card. He didn't invite us into the room, but he didn't try to keep us out when we walked in.

"You're Weel?" I addressed him while Mickey closed the door behind us, and then, not waiting for him to say yes, I turned to the broad-faced man sitting on the bed. "And you're Dahl?"

Weel spoke to Dahl, in a casual, metallic voice:

"A couple of gum-shoes."

The man on the bed looked at us and grinned.

I was in a hurry.

"I want the dough you took from Main," I announced.

They sneered together, as if they had been practicing.

I brought out my gun.

Weel laughed harshly.

"Get your hat, Bunky," he chuckled. "We're being taken into custody."

"You've got the wrong idea," I explained. "This isn't a pinch. It's a stick-up. Up go the hands!"

Dahl's hands went up quick. Weel hesitated until Mickey prodded him in the ribs with the nose of a .38-special.

"Frisk 'em," I ordered Mickey.

He went through Weel's clothes, taking a gun, some papers, some loose money, and a money-belt that was fat. Then he did the same for Dahl.

"Count it," I told him.

Mickey emptied the belts, spit on his fingers and went to work.

"Nineteen thousand, one hundred and twenty-six dollars and sixty-two cents," he reported when he was through.

With the hand that didn't hold my gun, I felt in my pocket for the slip on which I had written the numbers of the hundred-dollar bills Main had got from Ogilvie. I held the slip out to Mickey.

"See if the hundreds check against this."

He took the slip, looked, said,

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"They do."

"Good — pouch the money and the guns and see if you can turn up any more in the room."

Coughing Ben Weel had got his breath by now.

"Look here!" he protested. "You can't pull this, fellow! Where do you think you are? You can't get away with this!"

"I can try," I assured him. "I suppose you're going to yell, *Police!* Like hell you are! The only squawk you've got coming is at your own dumbness in thinking because your squeeze on the woman was tight enough to keep her from having you copped, you didn't have to worry about anything. I'm playing the same game you played with her and Main — only mine's better, because you can't get tough afterward without facing stir. Now shut up!"

"No more jack," Mickey said. "Nothing but four postage stamps."

"Take 'em along," I told him. "That's practically eight cents."

"Hey, leave us a couple of bucks," Weel begged.

"Didn't I tell you to shut up?" I snarled at him, backing to the door, which Mickey was opening.

The hall was empty. Mickey stood in it, holding his gun on Weel and Dahl while I backed out of the room and switched the key from the inside to the outside. Then I slammed the door, twisted the key, pocketed it, and we went downstairs and out of the hotel.

Mickey's car was around the corner. In it, we transferred our spoils — except the guns — from his pockets to mine. Then he got out and went back to the Agency. I turned the car toward the building in which Jeffrey Main had been killed.

Mrs. Main was a tall girl of less than twenty-five, with curled brown hair, heavily-lashed gray-blue eyes, and a warm, full-featured face. Her ample body was dressed in black.

She read my card, nodded at my explanation that Gungen had employed me to look into her husband's death, and took me into a gray and white living room.

"This is the room?" I asked.

"Yes." She had a pleasant, slightly husky voice.

I crossed to the window and looked down on the grocer's roof, and on the half of the back street that was visible.

"Mrs. Main," I said as I turned, trying to soften the abruptness of my words by keeping my voice low, "after your husband was dead, you threw the gun out the window. Then you stuck the handkerchief to the corner of the wallet and threw that. Being lighter than the gun, it didn't go all the way to the alley, but fell on the roof. Why did you put the handkerchief —?"

Without a sound she fainted.

I caught her before she reached the floor, carried her to a sofa, found smelling salts, applied them.

"Do you know whose handkerchief it was?" I asked when she was awake and sitting up.

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She shook her head.

"Then why did you take that trouble?"

"It was in his pocket. I didn't know what else to do with it. I thought the police would ask about it. I didn't want them asking questions."

"Why did you tell the robbery story?"

No answer.

"The insurance?" I suggested.

She jerked up her head, cried defiantly:

"Yes! He had gone through his own money and mine. And then he had to — to do a thing like that. He ——"

I interrupted her complaint:

"He left a note, I hope — something that will be evidence." Evidence that she hadn't killed him, I meant.

"Yes." She fumbled in the bosom of her black dress.

"Good," I said, standing. "The first thing in the morning, take that note down to your lawyer and tell him the whole story."

I mumbled something sympathetic and made my escape.

Night was coming down when I rang the Gungens' bell for the second time that day. The pasty-faced maid who opened the door told me Mr. Gungen was at home. She led me upstairs.

Rose Rubury was coming down the stairs. She stopped on the landing to let us pass. I halted in front of her while my guide went on toward the library.

"You're done, Rose," I told the girl on the landing. "I'll give you ten minutes to clear out. No word to anybody. If you don't like that — you'll get a chance to see if you like the inside of the can."

"Well — the idea!"

"The racket's flopped." I put a hand into a pocket and showed her one wad of the money I had got at the Mars Hotel. "I've just come from visiting Coughing Ben and Bunky."

That impressed her. She turned and scurried up the stairs.

Bruno Gungen came to the library door, searching for me. He looked curiously from the girl — now running up the steps to the third story — to me. A question was twisting the little man's lips, but I headed it off with a statement:

"It's done."

"Bravo!" he exclaimed as we went into the library. "You hear that, my darling? It is done!"

His darling, sitting by the table, where she had sat the other night, smiled with no expression in her doll's face, and murmured, "Oh, yes," with no expression in her words.

I went to the table and emptied my pockets of money.

"Nineteen thousand, one hundred and twenty-six dollars and seventy cents, including the stamps," I announced. "The other eight hundred and seventy-three dollars and thirty cents is gone."

"Ah!" Bruno Gungen stroked his spade-shaped black beard with a trembling pink hand and pried into my face with hard bright eyes. "And

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where did you find it? By all means tell us the tale. We are famished with eagerness for it, eh, my love?"

His love yawned, "Oh, yes!"

"There isn't much story," I said. "To recover the money I had to make a bargain, promising silence. Main was robbed Sunday afternoon. But it happens that we couldn't convict the robbers if we had them. The only person who could identify them — won't."

"But who killed Jeffrey?" The little man was pawing my chest with both pink hands. "Who killed him that night?"

"Suicide. Despair at being robbed under circumstances he couldn't explain."

"Preposterous!" My client didn't like the suicide.

"Mrs. Main was awakened by the shot. Suicide would have canceled his insurance — would have left her penniless. She threw the gun and wallet out the window, hid the note he left, and framed the robber story."

"But the handkerchief!" Gungen screamed. He was all worked up.

"That doesn't mean anything," I assured him solemnly, "except that Main — you said he was promiscuous — had probably been fooling with your wife's maid, and that she — like a lot of maids — helped herself to your wife's belongings."

He puffed up his rouged cheeks, and stamped his feet, fairly dancing. His indignation was as funny as the statement that caused it.

"We shall see!" He spun on his heel and ran out of the room.

Enid Gungen held a hand out to me. Her doll face was all curves and dimples.

"I thank you," she whispered.

"I don't know what for," I growled, not taking the hand. "I've got it jumbled so anything like proof is out of the question. But he can't help knowing — didn't I practically tell him?"

"Oh, that!" She put it behind her with a toss of her small head. "I'm quite able to look out for myself so long as he has no definite proof."

I believed her.

Bruno Gungen came fluttering back into the library, frothing at the mouth, tearing his dyed goatee, raging that Rose Rubury was not to be found.

The next morning Dick Foley told me the maid had joined Weel and Dahl and had left for Portland with them.

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Agatha Christie's detective-story career is marked by two crucial dates. In 1920 her first detective novel, THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES, *was published, and in 1926 she became a contender for the world's championship with the appearance of her greatest tour de force,* THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD. *Between these two years — in 1925, to be exact — Agatha Christie had a book published that we'll wager her most devoted fans know nothing of. It is a thin 12mo, in robin's-egg blue boards with a linen spine and a paper label; it was issued by Geoffrey Bles of London; and it was titled* THE ROAD OF DREAMS.

You never heard of it? Do not be chagrined. It is probably Agatha Christie's most obscure work. You see, it's a book of poetry. Yes, detective-story writers are often poets: remember a certain Bostonian (and Philadelphian, and New Yorker) named E. A. Poe?

It is not strange that even in her poetry Miss Christie wove the scarlet thread of murder and sudden death. We quote the following stanza from a poem titled "In a Dispensary":

From the Borgia's time to the present day, their
power has been proved and tried:
Monkshood blue, called Aconite, and the deadly cyanide.
Here is sleep and solace and soothing of pain —
courage and vigour new;
Here is menace and murder and sudden death — in
these phials of green and blue.

Thus irrelevantly we introduce the first Miss Marple story to appear in EQMM. "Strange Jest" has never been included in any of Agatha Christie's published books . . .

STRANGE JEST

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"AND THIS," said Jane Helier, completing her introductions, "is Miss Marple!"

Being an actress, she was able to make her point. It was clearly the climax, the triumphant finale! Her tone was equally compounded of reverent awe and triumph.

The odd part of it was that the object thus proudly proclaimed was merely a gentle, fussy-looking, elderly spinster. In the eyes of the two young people who had just, by Jane's good offices, made her acquaintance, there showed incredulity and a tinge of dismay. They were nice-looking people;

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the girl, Charmian Stroud, slim and dark — the man, Edward Rossiter, a fair-haired, amiable young giant.

Charmian said, a little breathlessly, "Oh! we're awfully pleased to meet you." But there was doubt in her eyes. She flung a quick, questioning glance at Jane Helier.

"Darling," said Jane, answering the glance, "she's absolutely *marvelous.* Leave it all to her. I told you I'd get her here and I have." She added to Miss Marple: "*You'll* fix it for them, I know. It will be easy for *you.*"

Miss Marple turned her placid, china-blue eyes toward Mr. Rossiter. "Won't you tell me," she said, "what all this is about?"

"Jane's a friend of ours," Charmian broke in impatiently. "Edward and I are in rather a fix. Jane said if we would come to her party, she'd introduce us to someone who was — who would — who could —"

Edward came to the rescue. "Jane tells us you're the last word in sleuths, Miss Marple!"

The old lady's eyes twinkled, but she protested modestly: "Oh, no, no! Nothing of the kind. It's just that living in a village as I do, one gets to know so much about human nature. But really you have made me quite curious. Do tell me your problem."

"I'm afraid it's terribly hackneyed — just buried treasure," said Edward.

"Indeed? But that sounds most exciting!"

"I know. Like Treasure Island. But our problem lacks the usual romantic touches. No point on a chart indicated by a skull and crossbones, no directions like 'four paces to the left, west by north.' It's horribly prosaic — just where we ought to dig."

"Have you tried at all?"

"I should say we'd dug about two solid square acres! The whole place is ready to be turned into a market garden. We're just discussing whether to grow vegetable marrows or potatoes."

Charmian said, rather abruptly, "May we really tell you all about it?"

"But, of course, my dear."

"Then let's find a peaceful spot. Come on, Edward." She led the way out of the overcrowded and smoke-laden room, and they went up the stairs, to a small sitting room on the second floor.

When they were seated, Charmian began abruptly: "Well, here goes! The story starts with Uncle Mathew, uncle — or rather, great, great uncle — to both of us. He was incredibly ancient. Edward and I were his only relations. He was fond of us and always declared that when he died he would leave his money between us. Well, he died last March and left everything he had to be divided equally between Edward and myself. What I've just said sounds rather callous — I don't mean that it was right that he died — actually we were very fond of him. But he'd been ill for some time.

"The point is that the 'everything' he left turned out to be practically nothing at all. And that, frankly, was a bit of a blow to us both, wasn't it, Edward?"

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The amiable Edward agreed. "You see," he said, "we'd counted on it a bit. I mean, when you know a good bit of money is coming to you, you don't — well — buckle down and try to make it yourself. I'm in the Army — not got anything to speak of outside my pay — and Charmian herself hasn't got a bean. She works as a stage manager in a repertory theater — quite interesting and she enjoys it — but no money in it. We'd counted on getting married, but weren't worried about the money side of it because we both knew we'd be jolly well off some day."

"And now, you see, we're not!" said Charmian. "What's more, Ansteys — that's the family place, and Edward and I both love it — will probably have to be sold. And Edward and I feel we just can't bear that! But if we don't find Uncle Mathew's money, we shall have to sell."

Edward said: "You know, Charmian, we still haven't come to the vital point."

"Well, you talk then."

Edward turned to Miss Marple. "It's like this, you see. As Uncle Mathew grew older, he got more and more suspicious. He didn't trust anybody."

"Very wise of him," said Miss Marple. "The depravity of human nature is unbelievable."

"Well, you may be right. Anyway, Uncle Mathew thought so. He had a friend who lost his money in a bank, and another friend who was ruined by an absconding solicitor, and he lost some money himself in a fraudulent company. He got so that he used to hold forth at great length that the only safe and sane thing to do was to convert your money into solid bullion and bury it."

"Ah," said Miss Marple. "I begin to see."

"Yes. Friends argued with him, pointed out that he'd get no interest that way, but he held that that didn't really matter. The bulk of your money, he said, should be 'kept in a box under the bed or buried in the garden.' Those were his words."

Charmian went on: "And when he died, he left hardly anything at all in securities, though he was very rich. So we think that that's what he must have done."

Edward explained: "We found that he had sold securities and drawn out large sums of money from time to time, and nobody knows what he did with them. But it seems probable that he lived up to his principles, and that he did buy gold and bury it."

"He didn't say anything before he died? Leave any paper? No letter?"

"That's the maddening part of it. He didn't. He'd been unconscious for some days, but he rallied before he died. He looked at us both and chuckled — a faint, weak little chuckle. He said, '*You'll* be all right, my pretty pair of doves.' And then he tapped his eye — his right eye — and winked at us. And then — he died. . . . Poor old Uncle Mathew."

"He tapped his eye," said Miss Marple thoughtfully.

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Edward said eagerly: "Does that convey anything to you? It made me think of an Arsène Lupin story where there was something hidden in a man's glass eye. But Uncle Mathew didn't have a glass eye."

Miss Marple shook her head. "No — I can't think of anything at the moment."

Charmian said, disappointedly, "Jane told us you'd say *at once* where to dig!"

Miss Marple smiled. "I'm not quite a conjurer, you know. I didn't know your uncle, or what sort of man he was, and I don't know the house or the grounds."

Charmian said: "If you did know them?"

"Well, it must be quite simple really, mustn't it?" said Miss Marple.

"Simple!" said Charmian. "You come down to Ansteys and see if it's simple!"

It is possible that she did not mean the invitation to be taken seriously, but Miss Marple said briskly: "Well, really, my dear, that's very kind of you. I've always wanted to have the chance of looking for buried treasure. And," she added, looking at them with a beaming, late Victorian smile, "with a love interest too!"

"You see!" said Charmian, gesturing dramatically.

They had just completed a grand tour of Ansteys. They had been round the kitchen garden — heavily trenched. They had been through the little woods, where every important tree had been dug round, and had gazed sadly on the pitted surface of the once smooth lawn. They had been up to the attic, where old trunks and chests had been rifled of their contents. They had been down to the cellars, where flagstones had been heaved unwillingly from their sockets. They had measured and tapped walls, and Miss Marple had been shown every antique piece of furniture that contained or could be suspected of containing a secret drawer.

On a table in the morning room there was a heap of papers — all the papers that the late Mathew Stroud had left. Not one had been destroyed, and Charmian and Edward were wont to return to them again and again, earnestly perusing bills, invitations and business correspondence in the hope of spotting a hitherto unnoticed clue.

"Can you think of anywhere we haven't looked?" demanded Charmian hopefully.

Miss Marple shook her head. "You seem to have been very thorough, my dear. Perhaps, if I may say so, just a little *too* thorough. I always think, you know, that one should have a plan. It's like my friend, Mrs. Eldritch; she had such a nice little maid, polished linoleum beautifully, but she was so thorough that she polished the bathroom floors too much, and as Mrs. Eldritch was stepping out of the bath the cork mat slipped from under her and she had a very nasty fall and actually broke her leg! Most awkward, because the bathroom door was

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locked, of course, and the gardener had to get a ladder and come in through the window — terribly distressing to Mrs. Eldritch, who had always been a very modest woman."

Edward moved restlessly.

Miss Marple said quickly: "Please forgive me. So apt, I know, to fly off at a tangent. But one thing does remind one of another. And sometimes that is helpful. All I was trying to say was that perhaps if we tried to sharpen our wits and think of a likely place —"

Edward said crossly: "You think of one, Miss Marple. Charmian's brains and mine are now only beautiful blanks!"

"Dear, dear. Of course — most tiring for you. If you don't mind I'll just look through all this." She indicated the papers on the table. "That is, if there's nothing private — I don't want to appear to pry."

"Oh, that's all right. But I'm afraid you won't find anything."

She sat down by the table and methodically worked through the sheaf of documents. As she replaced each one, she sorted them automatically into tidy little heaps. When she had finished she sat staring in front of her for some minutes.

Edward asked, not without a touch of malice: "Well, Miss Marple?"

Miss Marple came to herself with a little start. "I beg your pardon. Most helpful."

"You've found something relevant?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that, but I do believe I know what sort of man your Uncle Mathew was. Rather like my own Uncle Henry, I think. Fond of rather obvious jokes. A bachelor, evidently — I wonder why — perhaps an early disappointment? Methodical up to a point, but not very fond of being tied up — so few bachelors are!"

Behind Miss Marple's back, Charmian made a sign to Edward. It said: "She's ga-ga."

Miss Marple was continuing happily to talk of her deceased Uncle Henry. "Very fond of puns, he was. And to some people, puns are most annoying. A mere play upon words may be very irritating. He was a suspicious man, too. Always was convinced the servants were robbing him. And sometimes, of course, they were, but not always. It grew upon him, poor man. Toward the end he suspected them of tampering with his food, and finally refused to eat anything but boiled eggs! Said nobody could tamper with the inside of a boiled egg. Dear Uncle Henry, he used to be such a merry soul at one time — very fond of his coffee after dinner. He always used to say, 'This coffee is very Moorish,' meaning, you know, that he'd like a little more."

Edward felt that if he heard any more about Uncle Henry he'd go mad.

"Fond of young people, too," went on Miss Marple, "but inclined to tease them a little, if you know what I mean. Used to put bags of sweets where a child just couldn't reach them."

Casting politeness aside, Charmian said: "I think he sounds horrible!"

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"Oh no, dear, just an old bachelor, you know, and not used to children. And he wasn't at all stupid, really. He used to keep a good deal of money in the house, and he had a safe put in. Made a great fuss about it — and how very secure it was. As a result of his talking so much, burglars broke in one night and actually cut a hole in the safe with a chemical device."

"Served him right," said Edward.

"Oh, but there was nothing in the safe," said Miss Marple. "You see, he really kept the money somewhere else — behind some volumes of sermons in the library, as a matter of fact. He said people never took a book of that kind out of the shelf!"

Edward interrupted excitedly: "I say, that's an idea. What about the library?"

But Charmian shook a scornful head. "Do you think I hadn't thought of that? I went through all the books Tuesday of last week, when you went off to Portsmouth. Took them all out, shook them. Nothing there."

Edward sighed. Then, rousing himself, he endeavored to rid himself tactfully of their disappointing guest. "It's been awfully good of you to come down as you have and try to help us. Sorry it's been all a washout. Feel we trespassed a lot on your time. However — I'll get the car out and you'll be able to catch the three-thirty —"

"Oh," said Miss Marple, "but we've got to find the money, haven't we? You mustn't give up, Mr. Rossiter. 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again.' "

"You mean you're going to go — on trying?"

"Strictly speaking," said Miss Marple. "I haven't begun yet. 'First catch your hare —' as Mrs. Beeton says in her cookery book — a wonderful book but terribly expensive; most of the recipes begin 'take a quart of cream and a dozen eggs.' Let me see, where was I? Oh yes. Well, we have, so to speak, caught our hare — the hare being, of course, your Uncle Mathew, and we've only got to decide now where he would have hidden the money. It ought to be quite simple."

"Simple?" demanded Charmian.

"Oh, yes, dear. I'm sure he would have done the obvious thing. A secret drawer — that's my solution."

Edward said drily: "You couldn't put bars of gold in a secret drawer."

"No, no, of course not. But there's no reason to believe the money is in gold."

"He always used to say —"

"So did my Uncle Henry about his safe! So I should strongly suspect that that was just a simple blind. Diamonds, now they could be in a secret drawer quite easily."

"But we've looked in all the secret drawers. We had a cabinetmaker over to examine the furniture."

"Did you, dear? That was clever of you. I should suggest your uncle's own desk would be the most likely. Was it the tall *escritoire* against the wall there?"

"Yes. And I'll show you." Charmian went over to it. She took down

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the flap. Inside were pigeonholes and little drawers. She opened a small door in the center and touched a spring inside the left hand drawer. The bottom of the center recess clicked and slid forward. Charmian drew it out, revealing a shallow well beneath. It was empty.

"Now isn't that a coincidence," exclaimed Miss Marple. "Uncle Henry had a desk just like this, only his was burr walnut and this is mahogany."

"At any rate," said Charmian, "there's nothing there, as you can see."

"I expect," said Miss Marple, "your cabinetmaker was a young man. He didn't know everything. People were very artful when they made hiding places in those days. There's such a thing as a secret inside a secret."

She extracted a hairpin from her neat bun of gray hair. Straightening it out, she stuck the point into what appeared to be a tiny worm hole in one side of the secret recess. With a little difficulty she pulled out a small drawer. In it was a bundle of faded letters and a folded paper.

Edward and Charmian pounced on the find together. With trembling fingers Edward unfolded the paper. He dropped it with an exclamation of disgust.

"A damned cookery recipe. Baked ham!"

Charmian was untying a ribbon that held the letters together. She drew one out and glanced at it. "Love letters!"

Miss Marple reacted with Victorian gusto. "How interesting! Perhaps the reason your uncle never married."

Charmian read aloud:

"My ever dear Mathew, I must confess that the time seems long indeed since I received your last letter. I try to occupy myself with the various tasks allotted to me, and often say to myself that I am indeed fortunate to see so much of the globe, though little did I think when I went to America that I should voyage off to these far islands!"

Charmian broke off. "Where is it from? Oh! Hawaii!" She went on:

"Alas, these natives are still far from seeing the light. They are in an unclothed and savage state and spend most of their time swimming and dancing, adorning themselves with garlands of flowers. Mr. Gray has made some converts but it is up-hill work and he and Mrs. Gray get sadly discouraged. I try to do all I can to cheer and encourage him, but I, too, am often sad for a reason you can guess, dear Mathew. Alas, absence is a severe trial to a loving heart. Your renewed vows and protestations of affection cheered me greatly. Now and always you have my faithful and devoted heart, dear Mathew, and I remain —

Your true love,
Betty Martin

"P.S. — I address my letter under cover to our mutual friend, Matilda Graves, as usual. I hope Heaven will pardon this little subterfuge."

Edward whistled. "A female missionary! So that was Uncle Mathew's

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romance. I wonder why they never married?"

"She seems to have gone all over the world," said Charmian, looking through the letters. "Mauritius — all sorts of places. Probably died of yellow fever or something."

A gentle chuckle made them start. Miss Marple was apparently much amused. "Well, well," she said. "Fancy that, now!"

She was reading the recipe for baked ham. Seeing their inquiring glances, she read out: "Baked Ham with Spinach. Take a nice piece of gammon, stuff with cloves and cover with brown sugar. Bake in a slow oven. Serve with a border of puréed spinach."

"What do you think of that now?"

"I think it sounds filthy," said Edward.

"No, no, actually it would be very good — but what do you think of *the whole thing?*"

A sudden ray of light illuminated Edward's face. "Do you think it's a code — cryptogram of some kind?" He seized it.

"Look here, Charmian, it might be, you know! No reason to put a cooking recipe in a secret drawer otherwise."

"Exactly," said Miss Marple. "Very, very significant."

Charmian said: "I know what it might be — invisible ink! Let's heat it. Turn on the electric fire."

Edward did so. But no signs of writing appeared under the treatment.

Miss Marple coughed. "I really think, you know, that you're making it rather *too* difficult. The recipe is only an indication, so to speak. It is, I think, the letters that are significant."

"The letters?"

"Especially," said Miss Marple, "the signature."

But Edward hardly heard her. He called excitedly: "Charmian! Come here! She's right. See — the envelopes are old right enough, but the letters themselves were written much later."

"Exactly," said Miss Marple.

"They're only fake old. I bet anything old Uncle Mat faked them himself —"

"Precisely," said Miss Marple.

"The whole thing's a sell. There never was a female missionary. It must be a code."

"My dear, dear children — there's really no need to make it all so difficult. Your uncle was really a very simple man. He had to have his little joke, that was all."

For the first time they gave her their full attention. "Just exactly what do you mean, Miss Marple?" asked Charmian.

"I mean, dear, that you're actually holding the money in your hand this minute."

Charmian stared down.

"The signature, dear. That gives the whole thing away. The recipe is just an indication. Shorn of all the cloves and brown sugar and the rest of it, what is it *actually?* Why, gammon and spinach to be sure! *Gammon and spinach!* Meaning — nonsense! So

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it's clear that it's the letters that are important. And then, if you take into consideration what your uncle did just before he died. He tapped his eye, you said. Well, there you are — that gives you the clue, you see."

Charmian said: "Are we mad, or are you?"

"Surely, my dear, you must have heard the expression meaning that something is not a true picture, or has it quite died out nowadays: '*All my eye and Betty Martin.*' "

Edward gasped, his eyes falling to the letter in his hand: "Betty Martin —"

"Of course, Mr. Rossiter. As you have just said, there isn't — there wasn't any such person. The letters were written by your uncle, and I dare say he got a lot of fun out of writing them! As you say, the writing on the envelopes is much older — in fact, the envelopes couldn't belong to the letters anyway, because the postmark of the one you are holding is 1851."

She paused. She made it very emphatic: "1851. And that explains everything, doesn't it?"

"Not to me," said Edward.

"Well, of course," said Miss Marple, "I daresay it wouldn't to me if it weren't for my great-nephew Lionel. Such a dear little boy and a passionate stamp collector. Knows all about stamps. It was he who told me about rare and expensive stamps and that a wonderful new find had come up for auction. And I actually remember his mentioning one stamp — an 1851 *blue. 2 cent.* It realized something like $25,000, I believe. Fancy! I should imagine that the other stamps are something also rare and expensive. No doubt your uncle bought through dealers and was careful to 'cover his tracks,' as they say in detective stories."

Edward groaned. He sat down and buried his face in his hands.

"What's the matter?" demanded Charmian.

"Nothing. It's only the awful thought that, but for Miss Marple, we might have burned these letters in a decent, gentlemanly way!"

"Ah," said Miss Marple, "that's just what these old gentlemen who are fond of their joke never realize. My Uncle Henry, I remember, sent a favorite niece a five-pound note for a Christmas present. He put it inside a Christmas card, gummed the card together and wrote on it: 'Love and best wishes. Afraid this is all I can manage this year.'

"She, poor girl, was annoyed at what she thought was his meanness and threw it all straight into the fire. So then, of course, he had to give her another."

Edward's feelings towards Uncle Henry had suffered an abrupt and complete change.

"Miss Marple," he said, "I'm going to get a bottle of champagne. We'll all drink the health of your Uncle Henry."

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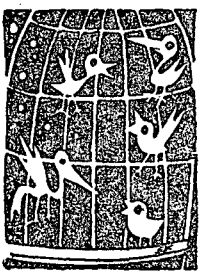
FOURTH-PRIZE WINNER: FRANCES CRANE



Have you ever thought of the zoological aspects of detectives and detective-story writers? Detectives, of course, are commonly referred to as bloodhounds, sleuth-hounds, and ferrets — either as a dog or a weasel, you'll notice, and complimentarily or not according to who is doing the referring. But it goes further than that: the names of detective-story writers and their chief characters have made considerable inroads on the animal kingdom. For example, Rex Stout has given us two beauties — Nero Wolfe and Tecumseh Fox. Neither animal-name, however, stands alone: among others, there are Louis Joseph Vance's Michael Lanyard, better known as The Lone Wolf, and Commissioner Wolff from the pen of Dietrich Theden; in the genus Vulpes are Ngaio Marsh's Inspector Fox, Valentine Williams's Tales of the Fox, otherwise Baron Alexis De Bahl, and that old friend of England's lush pseudo-memoirs era — Tom Fox, whose "revelations" were chronicled by that even older friend, Anonymous.

Bull is certainly an appropriate name for a policeman, if for no other reason than that of slang usage; it is not surprising, therefore, that David Frome named Mr. Pinkerton's colleague Inspector J. Humphrey Bull, and that Milward Kennedy created a Sir George Bull. A. A. Fair contributed Donald Lam (lamb, of course), and that reminds us of Patricia Wentworth's Inspector Lamb. E. Phillips Oppenheim's Mr. Joseph P. Cray suggests crayfish, and in the same school, so to speak, we find Barry Pain's detective-without-crime, Horace Fish, and George Selmark's Inspector Bass. Frances Noyes Hart, noted for THE BELLAMY TRIAL, *is assured membership in our Club of Criminological Creatures by virtue of her surname; as are Jonathan Stagge (stag) and Clinton H. Stagg (who recorded the adventures of an early blind detective, Thornley Colton), and still for the same patronymical reason, Cyril Hare of the Inspector Mallett stories. And further in the family Canidæ we have H. C. McNeile's Bulldog Drummond, A. E. Fielding's Inspector Pointer, and Torrey Chanslor's Amanda and Lutie Beagle.*

But it is the ornithological branch of the Fraternity of Faunal Ferrets that is most impressive and most numerous. To begin with, Anna Katharine Green named one of her many detectives Horace Byrd. There are at least two hawks — Anonymous's Dixon Hawke, the protagonist in a long series of English paperbacks, and C. E. Bechhofer Roberts's A. B. C. Hawkes; there is also a brace of falcons — Drexel Drake's The Falcon (note that Mr. Drake qualifies on two counts) and Michael Arlen's Gay Falcon. An interesting member of our bird family is Anita Boutell's Dr. Archibald Storke,

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as is Nicholas Olde's Rowland Hern (a variety of heron). Certainly, too, Stuart Palmer's Inspector Piper and Leslie Charteris's Inspector Teal are both in excellent standing. George Barr McCutcheon sponsored Anderson Crow, Detective; Dashiell Hammett once wrote about a poetic private eye whose first name was Robin; and going farther back into feathered ferretry, we find E. Phillips Oppenheim's master diplomat, Peter Ruff. A couple of daws (jackdaws) have nests in our 'tec tree: George Randolph Chester's Blackie Daw, the thievish partner-in-crime of Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, and Archer Dawe, J. S. Fletcher's first important short-story sleuth.

Our feathered friends of fiction also include Edgar Wallace's The Sparrow, Margaret Erskine's Inspector Septimus Finch, Arthur Somers Roche's Armand Cochet, The White Eagle, and those two perfect birds of blood-hounding, Mrs. George Corbett's Robert White and Brander Matthews's Robert White, both known more or less familiarly as Bob White.

Which brings us to the end of our round-robin: there are two criminological Cranes in detection's aviary. We were not fortunate enough, in the first running of EQMM's annual prize contest, to flush a Bill Crane story out of Jonathan Latimer, but we did capture another Crane — and a first at that. "The Blue Hat" is Frances Crane's first short story about Pat and Jean Abbott, that delightful domestic duo whom Will Cuppy considers "just about the most attractive mystery couple extant." You have met the Abbotts in a series of technicolorful novels — THE PINK UMBRELLA, THE AMETHYST SPECTACLES, THE TURQUOISE SHOP, THE INDIGO NECKLACE, *to mention some; now meet them on the banks of the Wabash in the steamboat-gothic case of the old-fashioned woman dressed in ruffled black taffeta and wearing a blue ribbon-and-flower-trimmed hat . . .*

THE BLUE HAT

by FRANCES CRANE

My Aunt Sue, my husband Patrick Abbott, and I were lunching at a fish place on the banks of the Wabash.

Below the screened window beside our table the wide gently-flowing river curved away between banks of new-green willows. On the other shore was the Illinois flood-plain, and in the distance were the characteristic low hills of Southern Illinois.

The service was *table d'hôte*. We ate fiddlers, French frieds, green salad, apple pie, and coffee. Fiddlers are young catfish. There was draught beer. You could also have domestic

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champagne, but at only one table in our end of the restaurant was it being served.

The champagne-drinking pair roused my curiosity. The woman looked tall and angular and was dressed in a ruffled black taffeta outfit forty years out of style. Her blue ribbon-and-flower-trimmed hat might have been new, but her beads and bangles and her reticule and the way her dark hair was frizzed on her forehead dated back with her dress. Her right hand glittered with rings in old-fashioned settings. Her left was covered with a white kid glove. She ate her salad before diving hungrily into her fish. Her companion was younger, with untidy reddish hair, a square weather-beaten face, little round reddish-brown eyes, and a powerfully built body buttoned snugly in a smooth-finished reddish-brown double-breasted suit.

As they left the restaurant I got a close-up of the woman's hard, blue-eyed face. I thought she might be forty-five or a well-done-up job of sixty.

Aunt Sue's nose wiggled. "Lilac perfume," she said. Then she said, "For heaven's sake!"

"Bride and groom," said Patrick Abbott.

"And about time, if you're right," Aunt Sue said.

"Oh, that was just a crack," Patrick said. Getting cautious. "I didn't know you knew them, Aunt Sue."

"I know her, not him. That was Emily Marks and her chauffeur." She said it in a voice which said she would rather not say it at all.

"Emily Marks?" I said. "Oh, Pat, she's the one who owns that house you call such a handsome piece of steamboat-gothic. You know, that place south of Elm Hill, all gables, balconies, railings, bay windows, stained glass, fretwork, curleycues, weather-vanes, lightning rods, and such." Elm Hill, Illinois, my home town, was about fifty miles north of this fish place.

"Emily Marks herself looks like an exceptional piece of steamboat gothic," Pat said.

"You mean, her bangs and bangles? I guess so. Let's call on her, Aunt Sue."

"Nobody calls on Emily, Jean. Nobody wants to. Besides, if one did, the door would be slammed in one's face."

"Who'd slam it?" Patrick asked.

"That chauffeur," said Aunt Sue.

"What's his name?"

"Harry Shoulders," said Aunt Sue, saying it as though the big brute had no right to a name, even a name like that.

"I remember now that Miss Emily's father worked as a boy on a Mississippi steamboat," I said. "He saw the houses in the South called steamboat gothic because they look sort of like showboats, which is how he came to build his."

"Mortgaged his wife's farm to do it!" sniffed Aunt Sue.

"But they got oil," I said.

"That came twenty years later," Aunt Sue said. "Emily was already grown up. She still has the oil income,

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of course. She is a very rich woman."

I said, "She lives on a fixed schedule, Pat. The winter months in Miami. The summer in a house she owns in a resort in northern Michigan. Six weeks each spring and six each fall in her Steamboat Gothic. The rest of the time is spent driving between these places. They always take the same routes and stop over in the same hotels. It's kind of wonderful, really."

"Wonderful?" my aunt cried. "It's terrible. Look at Emily Marks. Rich as butter, and not a chick or a child to care for. Dressing in that ridiculous way. Smelling of lilac perfume the way she did as a girl. Never seeing anybody but that chauffeur! She never shows her face in Elm Hill. That man does her marketing and, they say, her housework. The town knows she's home when some one sees smoke rising from her chimneys, or that chauffeur swaggers about town buying her quantities of roast beef and pork sausage. I'm talking too much." She paused. "Emily Marks, eating fish and wearing blue! I ask you! Why she hasn't worn blue since —"

"A bride is supposed to wear something blue," I said.

"Forget that bride stuff, Jeanie," Patrick said. "I was shooting off my big mouth."

Aunt Sue said, "Fish always made Emily sick. But as a girl she invariably wore blue because she had very lovely blue eyes. I remember the night we all went to that house to see the old Century out. Emily looked so lovely in a blue taffeta dress and the blue turquoise earrings and rings that —" She broke off, then said, "She went to St. Louis for a few days after that, and from then on — well, her behavior was queer. She does look young, doesn't she? I suppose there are tricks, when you're so rich."

Patrick said, "Has she any relations out West?"

"Emily has no relations," Aunt Sue said.

On leaving the restaurant Patrick popped into a phone booth. We went on and waited in the car, thinking nothing of it because he's forever popping into phone booths.

In Elm Hill we were staying with Aunt Sue's daughter Margaret McCrea and her husband Bill. Over cocktails that evening I asked, "Why doesn't Emily Marks wear blue?"

Peg smiled. "Because she said she never would. Period."

"She's got blue eyes," I said.

"Yep. Therefore she had a pash for blue. Showed them off. She planned to get married in blue. She went to St. Louis to buy a blue trousseau. But there wasn't any wedding and no more blue. Quite romantic, huh?"

"Smells of mothballs. Like old Emily," Bill said.

"You've never been close enough to Emily to smell mothballs," Peg said. "It was Lou Blackford she was going to marry, Jeanie."

"The school superintendent?"

"That's him. They got engaged at a New Year's party and she buzzed out to St. L. to buy her stuff. Then bang, no wedding bells."

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"How come I never heard that, Peggy?"

"People here lost interest in Emily long ago. Mother recently got reminiscent or I wouldn't have heard it myself. Frankly it doesn't interest me anyway."

"The thing that interests me is what's Emily to Harry Shoulders and what's Harry to Emily," said Bill.

"You'll never know, darling," Peg said. "Well, the story had the right lavender and old lace ending, anyhow. Neither Emily nor Lou ever married. Poor old Lou Blackford. He ought to be retired, but he had to support his mother, an extravagant old doxy, they say, till she died last year. He's horribly in debt. I always liked the old guy, didn't you?"

I nodded. Patrick said, "Emily's married now." I shook my head at Pat, but she said, "She's married to Harry Shoulders."

"My God Almighty!" Bill said.

"Watch out, Pat. This is a small town," I said.

Patrick said, "I haven't seen the license and didn't go to the wedding but they're married. Just married. They celebrated with a wedding breakfast of salad, fiddlers, French frieds, apple pie, and champagne."

"Wow!" Bill said.

"The bride wore a brand new sparkler and a wedding ring."

"Darling! She had on her left glove."

"She popped it on as we entered. That's what interested me first. Shoulders spied Aunt Sue and spoke to Emily, and she pronto dragged on the glove."

"What did Mother say?" Peg asked.

"She didn't see them at all till they went out," Pat said.

"Old Emily's a tight-fisted so-and-so," Peg said.

"Except with Shoulders," Bill said.

"Maybe he doesn't do so good either, Bill. He hangs his wrong kind of hat on one ear and dashes round in her high-priced cars and talks big. But otherwise who knows?"

"How rich is she?" Patrick asked.

"Nobody knows, unless it's her lawyer, Charley Jones," Bill said.

"Who exactly is Harry Shoulders?" Patrick asked.

"Local boy who made good," said Bill. "Got the job with Emily when he was nineteen or twenty and is still there. Draft didn't get him for some reason. He's getting on. Thirty-six or seven, maybe."

"Forty-one," Patrick said. "The bride is sixty-two."

"Well, for goodness sake!" I said.

Our cousins grinned, thinking Patrick was cracking in being so precise about their ages, and Bill went around with the shaker. Then Patrick said, "The really sinister thing is that Emily Marks Shoulders was eating fish and wearing blue."

"That whole set-up sounds sinister to me," said Peg. "What you kids want to do after dinner tonight? There's a good picture."

"You and Bill go," Patrick said. "Jean and I are calling on Lou Blackford."

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Nobody could talk Pat out of it. I went on arguing even after we dropped Peg and Bill at the Avalon Theatre, summing up reasons why we shouldn't call on Lou Blackford. The school-teacher had to scheme to get any privacy at all. Since his mother's death he lived alone in their dark red Victorian house with the iron fence and the iron deer hitching-post. A colored man named Sammy King did for him. Lou had no phone, purposely to insure himself against unnecessary calls. He was a popular man, however, and right-thinking people respected his wish to be alone after the countless annoyances of the school day.

Nevertheless Patrick drove on from the neon-rosy courthouse square into a shadowy side-street where lamp-posts stood far apart and unreal. He gave the rump of the iron deer a self-satisfied slap after handing me out of the car. This was awful, I said. Patrick said he had to know why Emily Marks wore that blue hat and wolfed catfish. "Now do as I've told you!" he growled, as he twisted the knob of the bell set in the glass-paneled door.

We waited. Patrick rang three times before the colored man opened the door. As instructed I cried, "Hello, Sammy," and pushed on in to the hall, with Patrick behind me.

I looked up, and there was Lou Blackford, in a purplish velveteen coat and house-slippers, standing in a golden-oak-framed door. His hair was snow-white. He wore horn-rimmed specs and in one hand he held a copy of Time Magazine. He looked angry. Then his long horsey dark-eyed face melted with his charming smile.

"Why, Jean!" he cried. He put out his hand. "How are you? Is this your husband?" They shook hands. Mr. Blackford sent Sammy back to the kitchen and took us into the living-room. "I must have known there'd be company. I've got a small fire in the grate. It takes away the gloom. Sit down. The sofa is as comfortable as anything, except my old Morris chair, which I selfishly occupy myself. Now. Tell me about yourselves."

The staid dark room, I was thinking, would not have made a good background for Emily Marks. Her flamboyant steamboat gothic suited her better.

"We should have phoned first," I said. I felt awful.

"I have no phone," Mr. Blackford said. "No doubt I seem anti-social. But all my days and a good many of my evenings have to be spent with the kids. My dear mother, who passed away only last year, had to have peace and quiet. Since the routine was established, I've kept it."

"And here we are, barging in like this!" I said.

"Circumstances alter cases," Mr. Blackford said, smiling. "Won't you smoke? I don't, because the parents of my kids would say I set a bad example. Will you have coffee? Or tea?" We declined, and he said, "I can't offer you wine or spirits. If I had them in the house the town would hear of it somehow and call me a drunk."

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Patrick grinned. He was liking Mr. Blackford.

"It takes guts for your job," he said.

"Not guts. Guile. Now, in your job — I understand you're a detective? Now, that would take guts, Mr. Abbott."

"Also guile," I said. "And the trouble with detecting is you're forever detecting. Today we lunched at a fish place near New Harmony, Indiana. Pat got interested in a couple and detected that they had just got married. And who do you think they were, Mr. Blackford? Emily Marks and her chauffeur, Harry Shoulders!" I felt terrible. I felt like sinking right through the old red carpet.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Blackford, and no one could have imagined that Emily was his own long-lost love. "Well, that's a good thing. Now the gossips can keep quiet for a change. I wonder where they were married?"

"In Poseyville, Indiana," Patrick said. My goodness! "About an hour before we saw them in the fish place, Mr. Blackford. We liked that place. Nothing to eat much but fish, but very good."

"Time was when Emily couldn't eat fish," said Mr. Blackford. "Time alters everything, doesn't it. I was once engaged to Emily Marks. We were very young and gay. She was very pretty. I saved my pennies to buy blue turquoise to match her eyes. I don't think I've ever seen so pretty a girl as Emily was at eighteen." He smiled. "It was just at the turn of the Century. Dear me."

"She looks years younger than Aunt Sue, though they're the same age," I said.

"I haven't seen Emily for many years," said Mr. Blackford. "I feel sorry for her. I hope that fellow is kind to her. She has had no one of her own for such a long time. Her parents died of pneumonia about the time they started getting all that money, and she has led an aimless life ever since. It's a pity she didn't marry Shoulders years ago if he is what she wanted."

"It's a pity you and Miss Emily didn't marry, Mr. Blackford."

He smiled that charming smile. "I had my mother. That was why we didn't marry in the first place. I had Mother and Emily couldn't see having her live with us and I hadn't money enough to maintain a separate establishment for Mother."

"But she is rich!"

"She wasn't then. She stood to inherit only that red clay farm, which was heavily mortgaged because her father had borrowed to build that fantastic house. The oil-money which came later saved the house, if it was worth the saving, and made Emily rich. But it was too late for us. Emily was proud, and so was I. There you are."

"I wish I could see the inside of that house," said Patrick.

"It's a mass of small rooms and cubbyholes. Fantastic."

"Do you think Miss Emily would sell it?" I asked. As I had been told to.

"Sell it?" Mr. Blackford said, and

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then he said, drily, "I don't know. I've never heard of Emily letting go of anything, but you could ask. You can't see her, of course. You can find out however from her lawyer Charley Jones. Why on earth would you want it?"

"I've taken a shine to it," Patrick said. "Has Emily Marks any relatives in California?"

"She has no relatives," Mr. Blackford said. Then he said, "Come to think of it her father had a son by an earlier marriage. A bad sort, I think. But he was never around here."

"He lived in California, didn't he?"

"I've no idea."

We chatted about other things for ten minutes, then took our leave. Mr. Blackford let us go reluctantly. His loneliness stalked beside us as we went arm in arm along the brick walk with its border of angled bricks. It went out the front gate with us, and got into our car with us beside the lonely iron deer.

Patrick drove around the block, parked and turned off the lights at a spot where we could see Mr. Blackford's front door. In about two minutes Mr. Blackford came out, hurried along the walk, and turned right outside the gate. Patrick started the car in a moment, put on only the parking lights, and eased along so that we could keep him in sight. Mr. Blackford wound up at the home of the lawyer Charley Jones.

"Fine," Patrick said. "Now we call on Emily Marks Shoulders."

I put my foot down. "Darling, we do nothing of the kind. This has gone far enough. This is a little town. My home town. You go nosing into things that are none of your business in a place like this and you'll get yourself lynched."

"Come on lynching!" Patrick said. He stepped on the gas. Then suddenly he swished in at the curb beside the Rexall Drugstore. There stood Sheriff Sam Rutherford. "Hi, Sam!" Patrick called. The sheriff came out to the car. "Ever heard of a half-brother of Emily Marks?" Patrick asked.

"Happens *I* did, sometime ago though," said Mr. Rutherford. "He came east round the time the old folks died and tried to make some trouble for Miss Emily. Didn't get nowhere, because that farm was hers in her own right from her mother. Name of Sylvester Marks. He wrote me letters afterwards, which is how I know."

"From San Francisco?"

"Los Angeles it was, Pat."

"Thanks. You going to be around here tonight?"

"Here for a while," said the sheriff. "Then home at the jail."

We drove on. I was positively suffering. This was my home town! "You don't even *know* that they're married," I said, as Patrick drove past the city limits and stepped hard on the gas. "You're guessing. You — you troublemaker —"

"I'm not guessing. I figured they'd got married in the nearest county seat, so as we came out of the fish place I phoned the county clerk of Posey

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County and hit the jackpot."

"You're crazy!"

"Maybe. But I couldn't think of going through life without knowing how come Emily Marks suddenly gobbles fish and wears blue hats."

The moon was shining. The white road rolled up and down in the white moonlight. The steamboat gothic house was painted white and looked on its lonely hilltop like a home for old ghosts. The fence around it was painted white, and so was a flock of vacant out-buildings which stood across an abandoned barn lot from the house. If there had ever been trees they were gone.

A dim light burned behind drawn shades in one room upstairs and another window gleamed on the ground floor, in what must be the kitchen wing.

Patrick put out the car lights and parked off the highway. "You wait here," he said. I promptly snatched the ignition keys and hopped out with him. The front gate was stuck from paint and disuse and wouldn't open. Patrick vaulted the fence. I had to do the same, and did, but snagged a nylon and caught up feeling furious and disgusted as he stood staring at the lighted upstairs room. Specifically at something which showed where the curtain lacked a couple of inches of meeting the sill. "It's the hat," he whispered.

"Darling!"

"Look," he said. "The balconies haven't any exits! They're only for decoration." He ruminated. "Too bad that one up there doesn't have any door. I could shinny up pronto and get that hat."

"Darling!"

"I'm going round the house. You go back to the car."

"Nope."

The shade on the glass-paned back door was not drawn. Inside the kitchen Harry Shoulders, minus collar and coat, was frying something on a kerosene stove. On the shelf of a sink serviced by an old-fashioned pump, a small oil lamp with a handle provided the light.

Patrick knocked loudly. Shoulders jumped, left the stove, put on his coat and came to the door with his right hand in his coat pocket. A gun! I quaked.

"Good evening," Patrick said cheerily. "We saw your light. We understand this house is for sale and we'd like to know —"

"Who told you that?"

"You mean, it isn't?"

"That's what I mean. Get out."

"Certainly," Patrick said. "Terribly sorry."

The man took a step forward and peered at me. The light was very vague where I stood, but he said, "I seen you folks some place."

Patrick beamed. "I seen you some place too. In Miami maybe? Round the Roney-Plaza, huh?"

"Why not?" The big guy was delighted at having been noticeable in that big stylish place. But the pan on the stove was smoking. "My fish are getting burnt," he apologized.

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"Sorry," Patrick said. The man was slowly closing the door. Patrick wagged a finger at the pump beside the sink. "I couldn't trouble you for a drink of water —"

"Ain't good to drink," the man barked, and the door was shut.

Patrick guided me straight to the car. We drove south a quarter mile, turned, drove back slowly. He turned out the lights and parked across the highway from the house. In a few minutes the light in the upstairs room paled and went out. In the downstairs hall the front door appeared. It had a ruby-red glass center panel rimmed round with squares of cut glass. The ruby glass grew brighter. Now you could see the decoration cut in the middle of the ruby glass. The glass darkened. It vanished.

Someone carrying a lamp had come downstairs and gone to the kitchen, no doubt to eat the fish.

Patrick took a screwdriver from the glove-box. "This time you stay here! Keep the keys in the ignition. Sit at the wheel. Be ready to scram."

"But —"

"Shush!"

He jumped out. He vaulted the fence and moved swiftly across the neglected lawn. Like a black spider he went up the side of that house, creeping swiftly from one group of curleycues to another. Now he was on the windowless, doorless balcony nearest the window where he had seen the hat. I knew he was after the hat. I sat with my heart pounding. The moonlight was wonderfully bright. I saw him hook his feet onto the balcony railing and swing his body like a bridge to the window beside the hat.

He braced himself with one hand on the ledge and tried with the other to open the window. He kept working at it. It did not budge.

My heart pounded. My throat felt dry. The woodwork where his feet were hooked was so old. It would crack under his weight. He would break his neck. The noise would fetch out that brute. The brute had a gun.

I pictured him falling, broken, shot, dead.

And now he was working with the screwdriver. Stretched out, a grim dark line against the white house, he was working away as though he had all the time in the world, trying to pry open the window to get at the hat. An eternity went by in five minutes. The window did not open.

I felt frantic. Suddenly the ruby glass in the front door lit up again. Slyly the light grew stronger, then waned from the bottom upward as the woman with the lamp climbed a steep staircase.

Patrick was still working at the window with the screwdriver. I was panicked. I had to touch the horn. I meant to touch it lightly. It bellowed.

The lamp in the hall stood stock still. A muffled voice sounded.

Then glass crashed and Patrick fell to the ground. I saw him pick himself up and speed towards me. I started the motor. The front door was flung open. A tall woman stood in the lamplight and fired at Patrick with a short black

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gun. Bullets zinged around us. Patrick jumped in. I threw the car into gear and headed for town.

"I got it," Patrick said.

"Got what?"

"The hat. What the hell made you blow that horn?"

"But someone was coming —"

"I knew that. I had to break the window. Damn it, another two seconds and I'd've had it without their knowing it. For a while, anyway. Now there'll be hell to pay. God damn it — women ——"

"Don't say it," I said.

He stuck a cigarette in his mouth and took out his lighter for a light. Under the little flame he examined the label in the hat. "Now we're cooking with gas," he purred. "I've got to make some long-distance phone calls. Have to make them from Elm Hill, unfortunately, since there's no time to lose."

"But —"

"Drive straight to Peg's."

"Pat, I ——"

"Stop being a ball and chain."

"Darling, what do you mean long distance?"

"I've got to call an operative in Los Angeles and another in St. Louis. Yeah, I know it's your home town. I know the operator will talk. But there's no time to lose."

"Okay," I said, giving in. "Mrs. Harry Shoulders packs a snappy automatic, don't you think?"

"That's my gal!" Patrick said.

Aunt Sue was at the McCreas, listening to the radio. So Patrick had to go upstairs to use the more private extension. Aunt Sue turned off the Telephone Hour to ask me confidentially if I thought Emily Marks had had her face lifted or if it was those hormones you read about. I said maybe it was just a good dye-and-pancake job. Aunt Sue touched her lovely white hair, and sighed. Patrick came downstairs and joined us. He kept very silent. His lean good-looking face was very grim. Aunt Sue tried to make talk. She said that all day long she'd been thinking of Emily Marks. Patrick brightened briefly and asked if Emily lived in a house when in Miami. Aunt Sue said she understood that she had her own house there and another in the Michigan resort. She always kept to herself. Never go any other place, Patrick asked again, except Miami, Elm Hill, and North Michigan? Never that she knew of, Aunt Sue said. What an existence! But, of course, her own choice.

The telephone bell rang.

Patrick shot upstairs to take the call in private and came right down to say that the show at the Avalon was over and Bill and Peg wanted to be picked up. That meant I had to do it. Aunt Sue decided that I could drop her at her house on the way — so a good twenty minutes went by before we were back. Patrick was then standing beside one of the tall columns at the front of the colonial McCrea house in a heart-to-heart with Sheriff Rutherford.

"Got to be mighty careful," the sheriff was saying, in his gruff voice.

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His dark face was all in a knot. "Prowlers, you say? Some day somebody will burn that old contraption down." Then, "Sure. Come on along . . . well, any time you say."

Patrick followed us into the living-room. I said, "Darling, did you happen to mention to the sheriff who the prowlers were?"

"Forgot that," Patrick said.

"Who prowled where?" Peg wanted to know.

"We prowled around the old Marks house," I said. "Patrick scaled it and busted a window and stole a hat. Now he tells the sheriff there's been prowlers there."

The law-abiding McCreas stood and stared. Patrick did a little more prowling up and down the big living-room. Bill fetched out the scotch. Pat went on prowling. Peg suggested bridge. Pat snapped out of it and we settled for poker. Patrick lost us fifty bucks before the telephone finally rang.

He took the call on the extension in the hall. We listened in.

"Yes . . . you must be a wizard to get that dope at this time of night. . . . I see . . . well, send the bill to me, and thanks very much . . . yes, pretty serious, I think . . . January 3rd, 1900 . . . one witness still living in St. Louis. Thanks very much. No, that's enough for now. Thanks again. You'll hear from me pronto."

He came into the living-room and stood beside the fireplace. He lit a cigarette.

"Lou Blackford and Emily Marks were married on January 3rd, 1900, in St. Louis, Mo.," he said.

This time our cousins *sat* and stared.

"I suspected that," Patrick said. "Two strong-minded people. Neither would give in. So Emily decided that if she could get him to marry her that would turn the trick. She inveigled him into meeting her in St. Louis. They got married. But she wouldn't give in and live with Mother Blackford and he stuck by mother."

"She must have divorced him then?" I said.

"I think not."

"Why?"

"Blackford said tonight that he had never heard of Emily's letting anything go that was once hers. He spoke rather bitterly. Perhaps he was thinking of himself."

"Gosh," Peg said. "Has she committed bigamy, Pat?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Oh, Pat! Let it lie!" Peg said. "What good will it do? Lou Blackford has had trouble enough."

"I don't think Blackford himself will let it lie, Peg. He dashed straight to a lawyer — her lawyer — the minute we'd left. After telling him she'd married Shoulders."

"Good for old Blackford!" said Bill.

I said, "All the same, let's not talk. Let Mr. Blackford tell it, Pat."

"That will depend," Patrick said. And his jaw hardened.

The telephone rang.

This time he closed the door and took the call privately. We heard the tinkle of the bell as he cradled the

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receiver. We heard it tinkle again as he made another call. After that he came in carrying his hat and raincoat. He and Rutherford were going out to the Marks house, he said. Bill asked if he could go along. Patrick smiled at Bill, who not so long ago had been an All-American tackle, and said he certainly could. They left us cold. But half an hour later they came back, without the sheriff, who was busy jailing the newlyweds.

I said, as Bill passed the scotch, "Well, that's my Pat, kids. He spotted the phony Emily straight off because she wore a blue hat and was too fond of fish."

"That wasn't the reason," said Patrick.

"Of course it was!" I said. "Aunt Sue said that Emily Marks never wore blue and couldn't stand fish."

Patrick's low voice took on an edge.

"Jean, baby, you are not very observant."

Bill cut in. "I felt kind of sorry for Shoulders. The poor goon."

"Me too," Pat said. "All he wanted was what he'd had."

"And what had he had, then?" asked Peg.

"What he called a good life. Enough to eat. Enough to spend. Not too much work. Girls. A fine car to drive when he stepped out evenings after Miss Emily turned in. He never dreamed it would suddenly end. Emily wasn't so old. She was healthy. Everything was jake."

"But she conked out," Bill said, "so he got in touch with the niece."

"How did he know she had a niece?"

"The niece was the daughter of half-brother Sylvester. A hard-boiled huzzy who had buried a couple of husbands and had gone a couple of years ago to Miami to try to interest her aunt in making her her companion and chief heir. Aunty threw her out, so niece goes home to Pasadena to brood but keeps in touch with Harry Shoulders. So when the old girl kicks the bucket with double pneumonia four days ago Harry telephones the niece asking what gives, and she tells him to wait till she gets here and planes right out for St. Louis. Harry meets her in St. L. with the car."

"Taking only time in Pasadena to buy a nice new blue hat," I said. "Not knowing that Aunt Emily never never wore blue."

Patrick gave me a look. Bill said, "Arriving here the niece insists on Harry making an honest woman of her. The poor guy is stuck. He's got the aunt's body in the cellar. He doesn't know exactly what to do."

"She tells him she's going to take her aunt's place," Patrick said. "Promises he'll carry on driving the car for her and living the same good life. So he decides maybe marrying her won't be so bad. He can still step out on her, can't he? Why not? So he buries the body in the cellar —"

"Which Pat suspected when he said the water from the kitchen pump wasn't fit to drink," I said proudly.

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"— and the niece, who's name is Pearl, dresses up in Aunt Emily's best black taffeta and some of her loot, douses herself with Emily's lilac perfume, but wears her own hat, and off they go to get married."

"That hat," I said. Patrick allowed it to pass.

"What about those rings?" asked Peg.

"The wedding and engagement rings were genuine dime store," Patrick said. "Well, when they bought the marriage license niece Pearl cleverly gives her aunt's age, 62, instead of her own, which is 49."

"Darned white of her, really," said Peg. "But are you sure Shoulders didn't murder Miss Emily?"

"The autopsy will tell," Patrick said. "I think he's telling the truth, though. He says she wouldn't let him call a doctor. So she died. The niece sold him the notion that she could go on forever posing as the aunt. She looked like Emily. The money comes in royalties. She would forge Emily's signature on the checks. What legal business there is is handled by the lawyer Charley Jones, but she would soon get rid of him. Emily never saw him anyway. Communicated by mail. She certainly asked for what happened."

"They always make one mistake," I said. "Hers was buying that blue hat."

Patrick snapped, "It was not the blue hat!"

"It certainly was! First, it was blue. Second, you snitched the hat, found Pasadena on the label, which along with finding out that her father's name was Sylvester, made it easy for you to tell the Los Angeles operative what to look for. So a blue hat —"

"It was not that hat!"

I was furious. I counted ten.

Bill, liking things nice, said, "They sure were scared. Had the car packed ready to scram when we rolled up. The bride pulled a gun on Rutherford. He let her have it, winged her, shot a hole in a tire, then Shoulders started blubbering and led us to the body. Lou Blackford will probably get Emily's money."

I waited just long enough to let Bill finish.

"Okay! If it wasn't the hat, what was it?" I snapped at Patrick.

"Look!" he said. His voice was low and deadly. "Why can't you ever learn to use your little brain? Think! Think hard, Jeanie, and tell me why a steamboat gothic job like Emily Marks — a woman whose habits were so fixed they bordered on the lunatic — a woman who'd never been anywhere but Miami, Florida, Elm Hill, Illinois, and northern Michigan — why would that woman *eat her salad as a first course*, like a native Californian?"

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Herewith we inaugurate a new series of Ellery Queen short stories. We shall do our best to write one story each month for an entire year. Each story will have a timely quality — the theme or background or something else about each tale will have a direct tie-up with the month of issue in which the story is published. For example, this first new adventure of Ellery Queen is a "September story" — it concerns the month when teachers and students go back to school after their annual summer vacation; and it is appropriately titled "The Adventure of the Three R's."

Yes, there is method in our chronological criminology. At the end of a full year we shall have a dozen stories, each of which will relate to a different month. When all twelve monthly murders have appeared in EQMM, we shall then publish the series in book form, and we have already chosen the book's title — CALENDAR OF CRIME.

Now read a story which might have been called "Goodbye, Mr. Chipp" . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE R'S

by ELLERY QUEEN

HAIL MISSOURI! which is North and also South, upland and river-bottom, mountain, plain, factory, and farm. Hail Missouri! for MacArthur's corn cob and Pershing's noble mule. Hail! for Hannibal and Mark Twain, for Excelsior Springs and Jesse James, for Barlowe and . . . Barlowe? Barlowe is the site of Barlowe College.

Barlowe College is the last place in Missouri you would go to (Missouri, which yields to no State in the historic redness of its soil) if you yearned for a lesson in the fine art of murder. In fact, the subject being introduced, it is the rare Show Me Stater who will not say, with an informative wink, that Barlowe is the last place in Missouri, and leave all the rest unsaid. But this is a smokeroom witticism, whose origin is as murky as the waters of the Big Muddy. It may well first have been uttered by the alumnus of some Missouri university whose attitude toward learning is steeped in the traditional embalming fluid — whereas, at little Barlowe, learning leaps: Jove and jive thunder in duet, profound sociological lessons are drawn from *Li'l Abner* and *Terry and the Pirates*, and in the seminars of the Philosophy Department you are almost certain to find Faith, as a matter of pedagogic policy, paired with Hope.

Scratch a great work and find a great workman.

Dr. Isaiah St. Joseph A. Barlowe, pressed for vital statistics, once remarked that while he was old enough

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to have been a Founder, still he was not so old as to have calcified over a mound of English ivy. But the good dean jested; he is as perennial as a sundial. "Even a cynic," Dr. Barlowe has said, "likes his grain of salt." And the truth is, in the garden where he labors, there is no death and a great deal of healthy laughter.

One might string his academic honors after him, like dutiful beads; one might recount the extraordinary tale of how, in the manner of Uther Pendragon, Dr. Barlowe bewitched some dumfounded Missourians and took a whole series of substantial buildings out of their pockets; one might produce a volume on the subject of his acolytes alone, who have sped his humanistic gospel into the far corners of the land. Alas, this far more rewarding reportage must await the service of one who has, at the very least, a thousand pages at his disposal. Here there is space merely to record that the liveliness of Barlowe's alarming approach to scholarship is totally the inspiration of Dr. Isaiah St. Joseph A. Barlowe.

Those who would instruct at Barlowe must pass a rather unusual entrance examination. The examination is conducted *in camera*, and its nature is as sacredly undisclosable as the Thirty-Third Rite; nevertheless, leaks have occurred, and it may be significant that in its course Dr. Barlowe employs a 16-millimeter motion-picture projector, a radio, a portable phonograph, one copy each of The Bible, *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, and *The Complete Sherlock Holmes;* and the latest issue of *The Congressional Record* — among others. During examinations the voices of Donald Duck and Young Widder Brown have been reported; and so on. It is all very puzzling, but perhaps not unconnected with the fact that visitors often cannot distinguish who are Barlowe students and who are Barlowe professors. Certainly a beard at Barlowe is no index of dignity; even the elderly among the faculty extrude a zest more commonly associated with the fuzzy-chinned undergraduate.

So laughter and not harumphery is rampant upon the Gold and the Puce; and, if corpses dance macabre, it is only upon the dissection tables of Bio III, where the attitude toward extinction is roguishly empirical.

Then imagine — if you can — the impact upon Barlowe, not of epic murder as sung by the master troubadours of Classics I; not of romantic murder (Abbot, Anthony to Zangwill, Israel) beckoning from the rental shelves of The Campus Book Shop; but of murder loud and harsh.

Murder, as young Professor Bacon of the Biochemistry Department might say, with a stink.

The letter from Dr. Barlowe struck Ellery as remarkably woeful.

"One of my faculty has disappeared," wrote the President of Barlowe College, "and I cannot express to you, Mr. Queen, the extent of my apprehension. In short, I fear the worst.

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"I am aware of your busy itinerary, but if you are at all informed regarding the institution to which I have devoted my life, you will grasp the full horror of our dilemma. We feel we have erected something here too precious to be befouled by the nastiness of the age; on the other hand, there are humane — not to mention legal — considerations. If, as I suspect, Professor Chipp has met with foul play, it occurred to me that we might investigate *sub rosa* and at least present the not altogether friendly world with *un mystère accompli*. In this way, much anguish may be spared us all.

"Can I prevail upon you to come to Barlowe quietly, and at once? I feel confident I speak for our Trustees when I say we shall have no difficulty about the coarser aspects of the association."

The letter was handwritten, in a hasty and nervous script which seemed to suggest guilty glances over the presidential shoulder.

It was all so at variance with what Ellery had heard about Dr. Isaiah St. Joseph A. Barlowe and his learned vaudeville show that he scribbled a note to Inspector Queen and ran. Nikki, clutching her invaluable notebook, ran with him.

Barlowe, Missouri, lay torpid in the warm September sunshine. And the distant Ozarks seemed to be peering at Barlowe inquisitively.

"Do you suppose it's got out, Ellery?" asked Nikki *sotto voce* as a sluggish hack trundled them through the slumbering town. "It's all so still. Not like a college town at all."

"Barlowe is still in its etesian phase," replied Ellery pedantically. "The Fall term doesn't begin for another ten days."

"You always make things so darned uninteresting!"

They were whisked into Dr. Barlowe's sanctum.

"You'll forgive my not meeting you at the station," muttered the dean as he quickly shut the door. He was a lean and gray-thatched man with an Italianate face and lively black eyes whose present preoccupation did not altogether extinguish the lurking twinkle. Missouri's Petrarch, thought Ellery with a chuckle. As for Nikki, it was love at first sight. "Softly, softly — that must be our watchword."

"Just who is Professor Chipp, Dr. Barlowe?"

"American Lit. You haven't heard of Chipp's seminar on Poe? He's an authority — it's one of our more popular items."

"Poe," exclaimed Nikki. "Ellery, that should give you a personal interest in the case."

"Leverett Chisholm Chipp," nodded Ellery, remembering. "Monographs in *The Review* on the Poe prose. Enthusiasm and scholarship. That Chipp . . ."

"He's been a Barlowe appendage for thirty years," said the dean unhappily. "We really couldn't go on without him."

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"When was Professor Chipp last seen?"

Dr. Barlowe snatched his telephone. "Millie, send Ma Blinker in now. . . . Ma runs the boarding house on the campus where old Chipp's had rooms ever since he came to Barlowe to teach, Mr. Queen. Ah, Ma! Come in. And shut the door!"

Ma Blinker was a brawny old Missourian who looked as if she had been summoned to the council chamber from her Friday's batch of apple pies. But it was a landlady's eye she turned on the visitors from New York — an eye which did not surrender until Dr. Barlowe uttered a cryptic reassurance, whereupon it softened and became moist.

"He's an old love, the Professor is," she said brokenly. "Regular? Ye could set your watch by that man."

"I take it," murmured Ellery, "Chipp's regularity is germane?"

Dr. Barlowe nodded. "Now, Ma, you're carrying on. And you with the blood of pioneers! Tell Mr. Queen all about it."

"The Professor," gulped Ma Blinker, "he owns a log cabin up in the Ozarks, 'cross the Arkansas line. Every year he leaves Barlowe first of July to spend his summer vacation in the cabin. First of July, like clockwork."

"Alone, Mrs. Blinker?"

"Yes, sir. Does all his writin' up there, he does."

"Literary textbooks," explained the dean. "Although summer before last, to my astonishment, Chipp informed me he was beginning a novel."

"First of July he leaves for the cabin, and one day after Labor Day he's back in Barlowe gettin' ready for the Fall term."

"One day after Labor Day, Mr. Queen. Year in, year out. Unfailingly."

"And here 'tis the thirteenth of September and he ain't showed up in town!"

"Day after Labor Day. . . . Ten days overdue."

"All this fuss," asked Nikki, "over a measly ten days?"

"Miss Porter, Chipp's being ten days late is as unlikely as — as my being Mrs. Hudson in disguise! Unlikelier. I was so concerned, Mr. Queen, I telephoned the Slater, Arkansas, authorities to send someone up to Chipp's cabin."

"Then he didn't simply linger there past his usual date?"

"I can't impress upon you too strongly the inflexibility of Chipp's habit-pattern. He did not. The Slater man found no sign of Chipp but his trunk."

"But I gathered from your letter, Doctor, that you had a more specific reason for suspecting —"

"And don't we!" Ma Blinker broke out frankly now in bosomy sobs. "I'd never have gone into the Professor's rooms — it was another of his rules — but Dr. Barlowe said I ought to when the Professor didn't show up, so I did, and — and —"

"Yes, Mrs. Blinker?"

"There on the rug, in front of his fireplace," whispered the landlady, "was a great . . . big . . . stain."

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"A stain!" gasped Nikki. "A *stain?*"

"A bloodstain."

Ellery raised his brows.

"I examined it myself, Mr. Queen," said Dr. Barlowe nervously. "It's — it's blood, I feel certain. And it's been on the rug for some time. . . . We locked Chipp's rooms up again, and I wrote to you."

And although the September sun filled each cranny of the dean's office, it was a cold sun suddenly.

"Have you heard from Professor Chipp at all since July the first, Doctor?" asked Ellery with a frown.

Dr. Barlowe looked startled. "It's been his habit to send a few of us cards at least once during the summer recess . . ." He began to rummage excitedly through a pile of mail on his desk. "I've been away since early June myself. This has so upset me I . . . Why didn't I think of that? Ah, the trained mind . . . Mr. Queen, here it is!"

It was a picture postcard illustrating a mountain cascade of improbable blue surrounded by verdure of impossible green. The message and address were in a cramped and spidery script.

July 31.

Am rewriting my novel. It will be a huge surprise to you all. Regards —

Chipp

"His 'novel' again," muttered Ellery. "Bears the postmark Slater, Arkansas, July thirty-first of this year. Dr. Barlowe, was this card written by Professor Chipp?"

"Unmistakably."

"Doesn't the writing seem awfully awkward to you, Ellery?" asked Nikki, in the tradition of the detectival secretary.

"Yes. As if something were wrong with his hand."

"There is," sniffled Ma Blinker. "Middle and forefinger missin' to the second joint — poor, poor old man!"

"Some accident in his youth, I believe."

Ellery rose. "May I see that stain on Chipp's rug, please?"

A man may leave more than his blood on his hearth; he may leave his soul. The blood was there, faded brown and hard, but so was Professor Chipp, though *in absentia.*

The two small rooms overlooking the campus were as tidy as a barrack. Chairs were rigidly placed. The bed was a sculpture. The mantelpiece was a shopwindow display; each pipe in the rack had been reamed and polished and laid away with a mathematical hand. The papers in the pigeonholes of the old pine desk were ranged according to size. Even the missing professor's books were disciplined: no volume on these shelves leaned carelessly, or lolled dreaming on its back! They stood in battalions, company after company, at attention. And they were ranked by author, in alphabetical order.

"Terrifying," he said; and he turned to examine a small ledger-like volume lying in the exact center of the desk's dropleaf.

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"I suppose this invasion is unavoidable," muttered the dean, "but I must say I feel as if I were the tailor of Coventry! What's in that ledger, Mr. Queen?"

"Chipp's personal accounts. His daily outlays of cash . . . Ah. This year's entries stop at the thirtieth day of June."

"The day before he left for his cabin!"

"He's even noted down what one postage stamp cost him . . ."

"That's the old Professor," sobbed Ma Blinker. Then she raised her fat arms and shrieked: "Heavens to Bessie, Dr. Barlowe! It's Professor Bacon back!"

"Hi, Ma!"

Professor Bacon's return was in the manner of a charge from third base. Having flung himself at the dean as at home plate and pumped the dean's hand violently, with large stained fingers, the young man immediately cried: "Just got back to the shop and found your note, Doctor. What's this nonsense about old Chipp's not showing up for the Fall brawl?"

"It's only too true, Bacon," said Dr. Barlowe sadly, and he introduced the young man as a full professor of chemistry and biology, another of Ma Blinker's boarders, and Chipp's closest faculty friend.

"You agree with Dr. Barlowe as to the gravity of the situation?" Ellery asked him.

"Mr. Queen, if the old idiot's not back, something's happened to him." And for a precarious moment Professor Bacon fought tears. "If I'd only known," he mumbled. "But I've been away since the middle of June — biochemical research at Johns Hopkins. Damn it!" he roared. "This is more staggering than nuclear fission!"

"Have you heard from Chipp this summer, Professor?"

"His usual postcard. I may still have it on me . . . Yes!"

"Just a greeting," said Ellery, examining it. "Dated July thirty-first and postmarked Slater, Arkansas — exactly like the card he sent Dr. Barlowe. May I keep this, Bacon?"

"By all means. Chipp not back . . ." And then the young man spied the brown crust on the hearthrug. He collapsed on the missing man's bed, gaping at it.

"Ellery!"

Nikki was standing on tiptoe before Chipp's bookshelves. Under *Q* stood a familiar phalanx.

"A complete set of *your* books!"

"Really?" But Ellery did not seem as pleased as an author making such a flattering discovery should. Rather, he eyed one of the volumes as if it were a traitor. And indeed there was a sinister air about it, for it was the only book on all the shelves — he now noted for the first time — which did not exercise the general discipline. It stood on the shelf upside down.

"Queer . . ." He took it down and righted it. In doing so, he opened the back cover; and his lips tightened.

"Oh, yes," said the dean gloomily. "Old Chipp's quite unreasonable about

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your books, Mr. Queen."

"Only detective stories he'd buy," muttered Professor Bacon.

"Rented the others."

"A mystery bug, eh?" murmured Ellery. "Well, here's one Queen title he didn't buy." He tapped the book in his hand.

"*The Murderer Was a Fox*," read Nikki, craning. "Rental library!"

"The Campus Book Shop. And it gives us our first confirmation of that bloodstain."

"What do you mean," asked Bacon quickly, jumping off the bed.

"The last library stamp indicates that Professor Chipp rented this book from The Campus Book Shop on June twenty-eighth. A man as orderly as these rooms indicate, who moreover scrupulously records his purchase of a postage stamp, would scarcely trot off on a summer vacation and leave a book behind to accumulate eleven weeks' rental-library charges."

"Chipp? Impossible!"

"Contrary to his whole character."

"Since the last entry in that ledger bears the date June thirtieth, and since the bloodstain is on this hearth-rug," said Ellery gravely, "I'm afraid, gentlemen, that your colleague was murdered in this room on the eve of his scheduled departure for the Ozarks. He never left this room alive."

No one said anything for a long time.

But finally Ellery patted Ma Blinker's frozen shoulder and said: "Did you actually see Professor Chipp leave your boarding house on July first, Mrs. Blinker?"

"No, sir," said the landlady stiffly. "The expressman came for his trunk that mornin', but the Professor wasn't here. I . . . thought he'd already left."

"Tell me this, Mrs. Blinker: did Chipp have a visitor on the preceding night — the night of June thirtieth?"

A slow change came over the woman's blotchy features.

"He surely did," she said. "He surely did. That Weems."

"Weems?" Dr. Barlowe said quickly. "Oh, no! I mean . . ."

"Weems," said Nikki. "Ellery, didn't you notice that name on The Campus Book Shop as we drove by?"

Ellery said nothing.

Young Bacon muttered: "Revolting idea. But then . . .Weems and old Chipp were always at each other's throats."

"Weems is the only other one I've discussed Chipp's nonappearance with," said the dean wildly. "He seemed so concerned!"

"A common interest in Poe," said Professor Bacon fiercely.

"Indeed," smiled Ellery. "We begin to discern a certain unity of plot elements, don't we? If you'll excuse us for a little while, gentlemen, Miss Porter and I will have a chat with Mr. Weems."

But Mr. Weems turned out to be a bustly, bald little Missouri countryman, with shrewdly-humored eyes and the prevailing jocular manner, the

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most unmurderous-looking character imaginable. And he presided over a shop so satisfyingly full of books, so aromatic with the odors of printery and bindery, and he did so with such a naked bibliophilic tenderness, that Nikki — for one — instantly dismissed him as a suspect.

Yep, Mr. Queen'd been given to understand correctly that he, Claude Weems, had visited old Chipp's rooms at Ma Blinker's on the night of June thirty last; and, yep, he'd left the old chucklehead in the best of health; and, no, he hadn't laid eyes on him since that evenin'. He'd shut up shop for the summer and left Barlowe on July fifteenth for his annual walking tour cross-country; didn't get back till a couple of days ago to open up for Fall.

"Doc Barlowe's fussin' too much about old Chipp's not turnin' up," said little Mr. Weems, beaming. "Now I grant you he's never done it before, and all that, but he's gettin' old, Chipp is. Never can tell what a man'll do when he passes a certain age."

Nikki looked relieved, but Ellery did not.

"May I ask what you dropped in to see Chipp about on the evening of June thirtieth, Mr. Weems?"

"To say goodbye. And then I'd heard tell the old varmint'd just made a great book find —"

"Book find! Chipp had 'found' a book?"

Mr. Weems looked around and lowered his voice. "I heard he'd picked up a first edition of Poe's *Tamerlane* for a few dollars from some fool who didn't know its worth. You a collector, Mr. Queen?"

"A *Tamerlane* first!" exclaimed Ellery.

"Is that good, Ellery?" asked Nikki with the candor of ignorance.

"Good! A *Tamerlane* first, Nikki, is worth at least $20,000!"

Weems chuckled. "Know the market, I see. Yes, sir, bein' the biggest booster old Edgar Allan ever had west of the Mississip', I wanted to see that copy bad, awful bad. Chipp showed it to me, crowin' like a cock in a roost-ful. Lucky dog," he said without audible rancor. "'Twas the real article, all right."

Nikki could see Ellery tucking this fact into one of the innumerable cubbyholes of his mind — the one marked *For Future Consideration*. So she was not surprised when he changed the subject abruptly.

"Did Professor Chipp ever mention to you, Weems, that he was engaged in writing a novel?"

"Sure did. I told ye he was gettin' old."

"I suppose he also told you the *kind* of novel it was?"

"Dunno as he did." Mr. Weems looked about as if for some goal for his spittle, but then, like his indignation, he swallowed it.

"Seems likely, seems likely," mumbled Ellery, staring at the rental-library section where murder frolicked.

"*What* seems likely, Ellery?" demanded Nikki.

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"Considering that Chipp was a mystery fan, and the fact that he wrote Dr. Barlowe his novel would be a 'huge surprise,' it's my conclusion, Nikki, the old fellow was writing a whodunit."

"No! A Professor of Literature?"

"Say," exclaimed Mr. Weems. "I think you're right."

"Oh?"

"Prof Chipp asked me — in April, it was — to find out if a certain title's ever been used on a detective story!"

"Ah. And what was the title he mentioned, Weems?"

"*The Mystery of the Three R's.*"

"Three R's . . . Three R's?" cried Ellery. "But that's incredible! Nikki — back to the Administration Building!"

"Suppose he was," said Professor Bacon violently. "Readin'! 'Ritin'! 'Rithmetic! Abracadabra and Rubadubdub. What of it?"

"Perhaps nothing, Bacon," scowled Ellery, hugging his pipe. "And yet . . . see here. We found a clue pointing to the strong probability that Chipp never left his rooms at Ma Blinker's alive last June thirtieth. What was that clue? The fact that Chipp failed to return his rented copy of my novel to Weems's lending library. Novel . . . book . . . *reading*, gentlemen! The first of the traditional Three R's."

"Rot!" bellowed the professor, and he began to bite his fingernails.

"I don't blame you," shrugged Ellery. "But has it occurred to you that there is also *a writing clue?*"

At this Nikki went over to the enemy.

"Ellery, are you sure the sun . . . ?"

"Those postcards Chipp wrote, Nikki."

Three glances crossed stealthily.

"But I fail to see the connection, Mr. Queen," said Dr. Barlowe soothingly. "How are those ordinary postcards a clue?"

"And besides," snorted Bacon, "how could Chipp have been bumped off on June thirtieth and have mailed the cards a full month later, on July thirty-first?"

"If you'll examine the date Chipp wrote on the cards," said Ellery evenly, "you'll find that the *3* of *July 31* is crowded between the *y* of *July* and the *1* of *31*. If that isn't a clue, I never saw one."

And Ellery, who was as thin-skinned as the next artist, went on rather tartly to reconstruct the events of the fateful evening of June the thirtieth.

"Chipp wrote those cards in his rooms that night, dating them a day ahead — July first — probably intending to mail them from Slater, Arkansas, the next day on his way to the log cabin —"

"It's true Chipp loathed correspondence," muttered the dean.

"Got his duty cards out of the way before his vacation even began — the old sinner!" mumbled young Bacon.

"Someone then murdered him in his rooms, appropriated the cards, stuffed the body into Chipp's trunk —"

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"Which was picked up by the expressman next morning and shipped to the cabin?" cried Nikki.

And again the little chill wind cut through the dean's office.

"But the postmarks, Mr. Queen," said the dean stiffly. "The postmarks also say July *thirty*-first."

"The murderer merely waited a month before mailing them at the Slater, Arkansas, post-office."

"But *why?*" growled Bacon. "You weave beautiful rugs, man — but what do they mean?"

"Obviously it was all done, Professor Bacon," said Ellery, "to leave the impression that on July thirty-first Professor Chipp was *still alive* . . . to keep the world from learning that he was really murdered on the night of June thirtieth. And that, of course, is significant." He sprang to his feet. "We must examine the Professor's cabin — most particularly, his trunk!"

It was a little trunk — but then, as Dr. Barlowe pointed out in a very queer voice, Professor Chipp had been a little man.

Out doors, the Ozarks were shutting up shop for the summer, stripping the fainter-hearted trees and busily daubing hillsides; but in the cabin there was no beauty — only dust, and an odor of dampness . . . and something else.

The little steamer trunk stood just inside the cabin doorway.

They stared at it.

"Well, well," said Bacon finally. "Miss Porter's outside — what are we waiting for?"

And so they knocked off the rusted lock and raised the lid — and found the trunk quite empty.

Perhaps not quite empty: the interior held a pale, dead-looking mass of crumbly stuff.

Ellery glanced up at Professor Bacon.

"Quicklime," muttered the chemistry teacher.

"Quicklime!" choked the dean. "But the body. Where's the body?"

Nikki's scream, augmented a dozen times by the encircling hills, answered Dr. Barlowe's question most unpleasantly.

She had been wandering about the clearing, dreading to catch the first cry of discovery from the cabin, when she came upon a little cairn of stones. And she had sat down upon it.

But the loose rocks gave way, and Miss Porter found herself sitting on Professor Chipp — or, rather, on what was left of Professor Chipp. For Professor Chipp had gone the way of all flesh — which is to say, he was merely bones, and very dry bones, at that.

But that it was the skeleton of Leverett Chisholm Chipp could not be questioned: the medius and index finger of the right skeletal hand were missing to the second joint. And that Leverett Chisholm Chipp had been most foully used was also evident: the top of the skull revealed a deep and ragged chasm, the result of what

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could only have been a tremendous blow.

Whereupon the old pedagogue and the young took flight, joining Miss Porter, who was quietly being ill on the other side of the cabin; and Mr. Queen found himself alone with Professor Chipp.

Later, Ellery went over the log cabin with a disagreeable sense of anticipation. There was no sensible reason for believing that the cabin held further secrets; but sense is not all, and the already-chilling air held a whiff of fatality.

He found it in a cupboard, in a green steel box, beside a rusty can of moldering tobacco.

It was a stapled pile of neat papers, curled by damp, but otherwise intact.

The top sheet, in a cramped, spidery hand, said:

The Mystery of the Three R's
by
L. C. Chipp

The discovery of Professor Chipp's detective story may be said to mark the climax of the case. That the old man had been battered to death in his rooms on the night of June thirtieth; that his corpse had been shipped from Barlowe, Missouri, to the Arkansas cabin in his own trunk, packed in quicklime to avert detection *en route;* that the murderer had then at his leisure made his way to the cabin, removed the body from the trunk, and buried it under a heap of stones — these were mere facts, dry as the professor's bones. They did not possess the aroma of the grotesque — the *bouffe* — which rose like a delicious mist from the pages of that incredible manuscript.

Not that Professor Chipp's venture into detective fiction revealed a new master, to tower above the busy little figures of his fellow-toilers in this curious vineyard and vie for cloud-space only with Poe and Doyle and Chesterton. To the contrary. *The Mystery of the Three R's*, by L. C. Chipp, was a labored exercise in familiar elements, distinguished chiefly for its enthusiasm.

No, it was not the murdered professor's manuscript which was remarkable; the remarkable thing was the manner in which life had imitated it.

It was a shaken group that gathered in Chipp's rooms the morning after the return from the Arkansas cabin. Ellery had called the meeting, and he had invited Mr. Weems of The Campus Book Shop to participate — who, upon hearing the ghastly news, stopped beaming, clamped his Missouri jaws shut, and began to gaze furtively at the door.

Ellery's own jaws were unshaven, and his eyes were red.

"I've passed the better part of the night," he began abruptly, "reading through Chipp's manuscript. And I must report an amazing — an almost unbelievable — thing.

"The crime in Chipp's detective story takes place in and about a small Missouri college called . . . Barleigh

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College."

"Barleigh," muttered the dean of Barlowe.

"Moreover, the victim in Chipp's yarn is a methodical old professor of American Literature."

Nikki looked puzzled. "You mean that Professor Chipp —?"

"Took off on himself, Nikki — exactly."

"What's so incredible about that?" demanded young Bacon. "Art imitating life —"

"Considering the fact that Chipp plotted his story long before the events of this summer, Professor Bacon, it's rather a case of life imitating art. Suppose I tell you that the methodical old professor of American Literature in Chipp's story owns a cabin in the Ozarks where his body is found?"

"Even *that*?" squeaked Mr. Weems.

"And more, Weems. The suspects in the story are the President of Barleigh College, whose name is given as Dr. Isaac St. Anthony E. Barleigh; a local bookshop owner named Claudius Deems; a gay young professor of chemistry known as Macon; and, most extraordinary of all, the three main clues in Chipp's detective story revolve about — are called — 'Readin',' ' 'Ritin',' and ' 'Rithmetic'!"

And the icy little wind blew once more.

"You mean," exclaimed Dr. Barlowe, "the crime we're investigating — Chipp's own death — is *an exact counterpart of the fictional crime Chipp invented in his manuscript*?"

"Down to the last character, Doctor."

"But Ellery," said Nikki, "how can that possibly be?"

"Obviously, Chipp's killer managed to get hold of the old fellow's manuscript, read it, and with hellish humor proceeded to copy in real life — actually to duplicate — the crime Chipp had created in fiction!" Ellery began to lunge about the little room, his usually neat hair disordered and a rather wild look on his face. "Everything's the same: the book that wasn't returned to the lending library — the 'readin' ' clue; the picture postcards bearing forged dates — the ' 'ritin' ' clue —"

"And the ' 'rithmetic' clue, Mr. Queen?" asked the dean in a quavering voice.

"In the story, Doctor, the victim has found a first edition of Poe's *Tamerlane*, worth $20,000."

Little Weems cried: "That's ' 'rithmetic', all right!" and then bit his lip.

"And how," asked Professor Bacon thickly, "how is the book integrated into Chipp's yarn, Mr. Queen?"

"It furnishes the motive for the crime. The killer steals the victim's authentic *Tamerlane* — substituting for it a facsimile copy which is virtually worthless."

"But if everything else is duplicated . . ." began Dr. Barlowe in a mutter.

"Then that must be the motive for Professor Chipp's own murder!" cried Nikki.

"It would seem so, wouldn't it?"

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Ellery glanced sharply at the proprietor of The Campus Book Shop. "Weems, where is the first edition of *Tamerlane* you told me Chipp showed you on the night of June thirtieth?"

"Why — why — why, reckon it's on his shelves here somewheres, Mr. Queen. Under *P*, for Poe . . ."

And there it was. Under *P*, for Poe.

And when Ellery took it down and turned its pages, he smiled. For the first time since they had found the skeleton under the cairn, he smiled.

"Well, Weems," he said affably, "you're a Poe expert. Is this an authentic *Tamerlane* first?"

"Why — why — why, must be. 'Twas when old Chipp showed it to me that night —"

"Really? Suppose you re-examine it — now."

But they all knew the answer before Weems spoke.

"It ain't," he said feebly. "It's a facsim'le copy. Worth about $5."

"The *Tamerlane* — stolen," whispered Dr. Barlowe.

"So once again," murmured Ellery, "we find duplication. I think that's all. Or should I say, it's too much?"

And he lit a cigaret and seated himself in one of Professor Chipp's chairs, puffing contentedly.

"All!" exclaimed Dr. Barlowe. "I confess, Mr. Queen, you've — you've baffled me no end in this investigation. All? It's barely begun! *Who* has done all this?"

"Wait," said Bacon slowly. "It may be, Doctor, we don't need Queen's eminent services at that. If the rest has followed Chipp's plot so faithfully, why not the most important plot element of all?"

"That's true, Ellery," said Nikki with shining eyes. "*Who is the murderer in Professor Chipp's detective story?*"

Ellery glanced at the cowering little figure of Claude Weems.

"The character," he replied cheerfully, "whom Chipp had named Claudius Deems."

The muscular young professor snarled, and he sprang.

"In your enthusiasm, Bacon," murmured Ellery, without stirring from his chair, "don't throttle him. After all, he's such a little fellow, and you're so large — and powerful."

"Kill old Chipp, would you!" growled Professor Bacon; but his grip relaxed a little.

"Mr. Weems," said Nikki, looking displeased. "Of course! The murderer forged the dates on the postcards so we wouldn't know the crime had been committed on June thirtieth. And who'd have reason to falsify the true date of the crime? The one man who'd visited Professor Chipp that night!"

"The damned beast could easily have got quicklime," said Bacon, shaking Weems like a rabbit, "by stealing it from the Chemistry Department after everyone'd left the college for the summer."

"Yes!" said Nikki. "Remember Weems himself told us he didn't leave Barlowe until July fifteenth?"

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"I do, indeed. And Weems's motive, Nikki?"

"Why, to steal Chipp's $20,000 *Tamerlane*."

"I'm afraid that's so," groaned the dean. "Weems as a bookseller could easily have got hold of a cheap facsimile to substitute for the authentic first edition."

"And he said he'd gone on a walking tour, didn't he?" Nikki added, warming to her own logic. "Well, I'll bet he 'walked' into that Arkansas post-office, Ellery, on July thirty-first, to mail those postcards!"

Weems found his voice.

"Why, now, listen here, little lady, I didn't kill old Chipp —" he began in the most unconvincing tones imaginable.

They all eyed him with savage scorn — all, that is, but Ellery.

"Very true, Weems," said Ellery, nodding. "You most certainly did not."

"He didn't . . ." began Dr. Barlowe, blinking.

"I . . . didn't?" gasped Weems, which seemed to Nikki a remarkable thing for him to have said.

"No, although I'm afraid I've been led very cleverly to *believe* that you did, Weems."

"See here, Mr. Queen," said the dean of Barlowe in a terrible voice. "Precisely what do you mean?"

"And how do you know he didn't?" shouted Bacon. "I told you, Doctor — this fellow's grossly overrated. The next thing you'll tell us is that Chipp hasn't been murdered at all!"

"Exactly," said Ellery. "Therefore Weems couldn't have murdered him."

"Ellery —" moaned Nikki.

"Your syllogism seems a bit perverted, Mr. Queen," said Dr. Barlowe severely.

"Yes!" snarled Bacon. "What about the evidence —?"

"Very well," said Ellery briskly, "let's consider the evidence. Let's consider the evidence of the skeleton we found near Chipp's cabin."

"Those dry bones? What about 'em?"

"Just that, Professor — they're so very dry. Bacon, you're a biologist as well as a chemist. Under normal conditions, how long does it take for the soft parts of a body to decompose completely?"

"How long . . .?" The young man moistened his lips. "Muscles, stomach, liver — from three to four years. But —"

"And for decomposition of the fibrous tissues, the ligaments?"

"Oh, five years or so more. But —"

"And yet," sighed Ellery, "that desiccated skeleton was supposed to be the remains of a man who'd been alive *a mere eleven weeks before*. And not merely that — I now appeal to your chemical knowledge, Professor. Just what is the effect of quicklime on human flesh and bones?"

"Well . . . it's pulverulent. Would dry out a body —"

"Would quicklime destroy the tissues?"

"Er . . . no."

"*It would tend to preserve them?*"

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"Er . . . yes."

"Therefore the skeleton we found couldn't possibly have been the mortal remains of Professor Chipp."

"But the right hand, Ellery," cried Nikki. "The missing fingers — just like Professor Chipp's —"

"I shouldn't think," said Ellery dryly, "snapping a couple of dry bones off a man dead eight or ten years would present much of a problem."

"Eight or ten years . . ."

"Surely, Nikki, it suggests the tenant of some outraged grave . . . or, considering the facts at our disposal, the far likelier theory that it came from a laboratory closet in the Biology Department of Barlowe College." And Professor Bacon cringed before Ellery's accusing glance, which softened suddenly in laughter. "Now, really, gentlemen. Hasn't this hoax gone far enough?"

"Hoax, Mr. Queen?" choked the dean of Barlowe with feeble indignation.

"Come, come, Doctor," chuckled Ellery, "the game's up. Let me review the fantastic facts. What is this case? A detective story come to life. Bizarre — fascinating — to be sure. But really, Doctor, so utterly unconvincing!

"How conveniently all the clues in Chipp's manuscript found reflections in reality! The lending-library book, so long overdue — in the story, in the crime. The postcards written in advance — in the story, in the crime. The *Tamerlane* facsimile right here on Chipp's shelf — exactly as the manuscript has it. It would seem as if Chipp collaborated in his own murder."

"Collab — I can't make hide nor hair of this, Mr. Queen," began little Mr. Weems in a crafty wail.

"Now, now, Weems, as the bookseller-Poe-crony you were the key figure in the plot! Although I must confess, Dr. Barlowe, *you* played your role magnificently, too — and, Professor Bacon, you missed a career in the theatre; you really did. The only innocent, I daresay, is Ma Blinker — and to you, gentlemen, I gladly leave the trial of facing that doughty lady when she finds out how her honest grief has been exploited in the interest of commerce."

"Commerce?" whimpered Nikki, who by now was holding her pretty head to keep it from flying off.

"Of course, Nikki. I was invited to Barlowe to follow an elaborate trail of carefully-placed 'clues' in order to reach the conclusion that Claude Weems had 'murdered' Professor Chipp. When I announced Weems's 'guilt,' the hoax was supposed to blow up in my face. *Old Prof Chipp would pop out of his hiding place grinning from ear to silly ear.*"

"Pop out . . . You mean," gasped Nikki, "you mean Professor Chipp is *alive?*"

"Only conclusion that makes sense, Nikki. And then," Ellery went on, glaring at the three cowering men, "imagine the headlines. 'Famous Sleuth Tricked By Hoax — Pins Whodunit

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On Harmless Prof.' Commerce? I'll say! Chipp's *Mystery of the Three R's*, launched by such splendid publicity, would be swallowed by a publisher as the whale swallowed Jonah — and there we'd have . . . presumably . . . a sensational bestseller.

"The whole thing, Nikki, was a conspiracy hatched by the dean of Barlowe College, his two favorite professors, and their good friend the campus bookseller — a conspiracy to put old Chipp's first detective story over with a bang!"

And now the little wind blew warm, bringing the blood of shame to six male cheeks.

"Mr. Queen —" began the dean hoarsely.

"Mr. Queen —" began the biochemistry professor hoarsely.

"Mr. Queen —" began the bookseller hoarsely.

"Come, come, gentlemen!" cried Ellery. "All is not lost! We'll go through with the plot! I make only one condition. Where the devil is Chipp? I want to shake the old scoundrel's hand."

Barlowe is an unusual college.

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HAVING IMPOSSIBLE TIME

During John Dickson Carr's most recent visit to the United States we spent considerable time with the creator of Dr. Gideon Fell and H. M. We attended literary luncheons, 'tec teas, and detective dinners. We went bookhunting together, and many a second-hand dealer failed to recognize the two detective-story writers who browsed among their dusty shelves. John still has a soft spot in his homicidal heart for the work of Carolyn Wells. Your Editor was able to steer John to a specialist (House of El Dieff) who had, believe it or not, a complete collection of Carolyn Wells's crime novels. John bought the whole works — lock, stock, and barrel — and arranged to have the 150-odd volumes shipped to his home in England.

And all the time we talked shop — while eating, traveling, or just sitting around. There was that memorable evening in your Editor's study when we killed imaginary characters by the carload and between us killed a bottle of Burdon's prewar sherry. We remember that evening vividly because at one stage John said he was quite tired and asked what time it was. Your Editor glanced at his watch and said: "Ten o'clock." It was too early to break up, so we continued discussing the multifarious phases of upper-and-lower-case detection. Time passed and John again commented on his fatigue. What time was it now? Your Editor consulted his watch and reported: "Ten o'clock." Neither of us saw anything remarkable in this statement. We kept on talking about our favorite inexhaustible subject. Finally John said he was really tired — perhaps he'd better start back for his hotel. By the way, what time was it? Again your Editor looked at his watch and again it was ten o'clock. Suddenly we stared (with apologies to W. Cuppy) at one another. Still ten o'clock? But that was impossible! The answer to the riddle was childishly simple: the sherry had mellowed us to the imperceptive point where neither of us realized that ten o'clock occurs only once, not three times, in the course of a single evening! Yes, your Editor's watch had stopped — and the world's foremost exponent of the "impossible crime" had thus been made the victim of an "impossible time."

Before John left America he signed a contract with EQMM. By its terms John Dickson Carr and/or Carter Dickson promised to write six original short stories especially and exclusively for readers of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." So now you know what to expect in the more or less immediate future — new Dr. Fell tales and possibly the first H. M. short story ever written. Happy prospect! — and no one looks forward more avidly to John's new stories than ***Your Most Humble Servant.***

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In the meantime we bring you another of the radio ratiocinations that John dreamed up some time ago for "Suspense," that excellent CBS program. Although in drama form instead of straight prose, "The Devil in the Summer House" is still the genuine John Dickson Carr article: the "impossible crime" that in the end becomes all too possible. Until his new short stories begin to arrive, these radio plays represent the only John Dickson Carr tales that have never appeared in print — another important EQMM "first."

THE DEVIL IN THE SUMMER HOUSE

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The Characters

JOSEPH PARKER	*the family lawyer*
CAPTAIN BURKE	*of the New York Homicide Bureau*
JERRY KENYON	*who died nearly thirty years ago*
ISABEL KENYON	*his wife*
PAUL	*her brother*
ANGELA FISKE	*the other woman*
KITTY	*the maid*

Somewhere along the Hudson, perhaps not far from Tarrytown, there is a modest house in its own grounds. Behind it, in a spacious garden, stands a summer house of evil memory. More than twenty-five years ago, a man shot himself, or, at least, died in that summer house. They found Major Kenyon with a scorched bullethole in his head, and the weapon beside him. But we are in the present now. The latticed summer house has grown heavy with vines. And only the other evening two men came into that garden at twilight, over the shaggy grass, as a storm was brewing along the Hudson. . . .

PARKER: (*Elderly, very much the conservative family lawyer*) Who's there?

BURKE: (*Worried*) Easy, my friend! Easy! I was just going to ask you the same thing.

PARKER: My name is Parker. I'm an attorney. That's not . . . (*as though peering*) . . . that's not Captain Burke?

BURKE: The very same and no other. I thought I recognized you, Mr. Parker.

PARKER: And what is a captain of the Homicide Bureau doing so far from New York?

BURKE: We're only at Tarrytown, you know. I've just come from . . . (*hesitates*) . . . up the river a ways. They told me there'd be a housekeeper here, but I don't see any lights.

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PARKER: You've got business here?
BURKE: In a way. Have you?
PARKER: (*Blankly*) I don't know.
BURKE: You don't *know*?
PARKER: Tell me, Captain, did you ever get an anonymous letter from a dead man? (*A long roll of thunder*)
PARKER: (*Insistently*) Did you?
BURKE: No, I can't say I did. If the letter's anonymous, how do you know the man's dead?
PARKER: Because they're all dead. Every last one of them. Dead and under the ground, where they can't be hurt any longer. Look! There's the summer house where Jerry Kenyon used to work. There are the windows of the library and the dining-room, looking towards it. Confound this lightning!
BURKE: (*Matter-of-factly*) Makes the windows blaze, don't it?
PARKER: Jerry Kenyon hadn't a care in the world. And yet he shot himself. I'll show you the letter.
BURKE: I can't read anything in this light. But if we can get inside the house . . . ?
PARKER: Of course we can get into the house. I've got the keys. But *why* should a dead person send me a letter?

(*Music up*)

PARKER: This is the library, you see.
BURKE: I notice they've left the lights working.
PARKER: Yes. Same old heavy furniture. Same old thick carpet. Same old globe-map.
BURKE: But this letter you were talking about. . . ?
PARKER: It's in my brief case. Here. Read it.
BURKE: Wait a minute! This thing is dated . . . November 2nd, 1918!
PARKER: That's right. But it was mailed *yesterday!*
BURKE: From where?
PARKER: I don't remember. I didn't keep the envelope. Read it!
BURKE: "*Dear Joe*" —
PARKER: In case you didn't know it, "Joe" is your obedient servant.
BURKE: You look more like J. Witherspoon Parker than Joe Parker. "*Dear Joe. If you want to know how Major Kenyon really died. . . .*
PARKER: But we know how he died!
BURKE: "*If you want to know how Major Kenyon really died, look in the third drawer of the desk in the library. Press hard at the back of the drawer. Yours very truly* —" And then nothing. No signature. Written in block capitals.
PARKER: Look! There's the chair where Isabel sat on the afternoon it happened. Isabel was Jerry Kenyon's wife. Beautiful woman even though past forty. There's the door that the maid let me in by. (*Vacantly*) You know, Captain, it seems to me they're all here tonight.
BURKE: Who?
PARKER:
"We stand 'neath the sounding rafter,
And the walls around us are bare;
As they echo our peals of laughter
It seems that the dead are there."
BURKE: "Yet we stand to our glasses steady —"
PARKER: You know it too?

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BURKE: It was in my school-reader. How does the rest of it go?

"Yet we stand to our glasses steady,
And drink to our comrades' eyes;
Here's a glass to the dead already —
Hurrah for the next that dies!"

(*A heavy crash of thunder*)

PARKER: (*Ashamedly*) I don't know what's come over me, talking that way. But I was very fond of those people.

BURKE: Are you going to look in the desk-drawer?

PARKER: This is all a lot of nonsense!

BURKE: Then why are you here, Mr. Parker?

PARKER: Jerry Kenyon was always a happy man. At least, that's what I thought. Big, boisterous fellow —

BURKE: Yes?

PARKER: He had a good position with Vitatone. You know, the phonograph company. But he'd just been made a major in the Army. 1917 — there was a war on then, if you remember.

BURKE: I remember. To make the world safe for Democracy.

PARKER: Old days. Old heartaches. Old memories. I remember a blazing hot day in August when all the windows were up. I remember this room. And Isabel . . . that was Jerry's wife . . . sitting in that chair, knitting. I remember . . .

(*As his voice fades, there is a knock at the door, which opens. Kitty, the maid, is young and has a faintly insolent manner. Isabel Kenyon is in her forties; she has a very pleasant voice*)

ISABEL: Yes, Kitty? What is it?

KITTY: There's a man to see you, Mrs. Kenyon. He says his name's Parker.

ISABEL: Mr. Parker's an old friend of ours. Show him in, please.

KITTY: All right, ma'am. Shall I take your knitting and your knitting-bag?

ISABEL: (*Astonished*) Why on earth should you take my knitting?

KITTY: I dunno, Mrs. Kenyon. I just wondered. (*Over her shoulder*) You can come in now.

PARKER: Thank you. (*Door closes*)

ISABEL: Hello, Joe.

PARKER: Hello, Isabel.

ISABEL: Joe, I must apologize for Kitty. Servants are getting to be a problem nowadays.

PARKER: *She* looks pretty enough to get along.

ISABEL: Oh, Kitty's got large ideas. She wants to go on the stage, if you please, and do imitations. Like Miss Draper. (*Tensely*) If she knew how hard it was, *acting* all your life . . .

PARKER: Isabel. You've been crying.

ISABEL: I have *not!* At least . . .

PARKER: Is it about Jerry?

ISABEL: Isn't it always about Jerry?

PARKER: Where is he? I want to see him before I go.

ISABEL: He's probably out in the summer house. He's got a lot of work to catch up with. He's — he's going overseas before long.

PARKER: Yes. I know.

ISABEL: If you look out of the window, you can see the door of the summer house. (*Pettishly*) Go and get Jerry.

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Go on, get him! Everybody who comes to this house comes to see Jerry. Nobody comes to see *me.*

PARKER: That's not true, Isabel, and you know it.

ISABEL: (*Checking herself*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. It's this heat, or — other things. But sometimes I'd like to put a gun to my head, and . . .

(*A sharp pistol shot*)

PARKER: That sounded like a shot!

ISABEL: It *was* a shot, Joe dear.

PARKER: In the house? It doesn't seem to worry you.

ISABEL: It's only Paul. My brother Paul. I'm not sure if you've met him.

PARKER: I don't think so.

ISABEL: He's staying with us. Jerry's fixed him up a pistol-shooting range in the cellar. Poor Paul's a terribly bad shot. Not like the rest of us. I doubt whether he could hit anything unless he actually got dead on the target and . . .

(*Four shots, spaced in twos*)

ISABEL: You don't seem to like it, Joe. Shall I have Kitty go down and tell him to stop?

PARKER: No, no. I suppose young America ought to learn how to use a gun.

ISABEL: Of course.

PARKER: But about Jerry . . .

ISABEL: *Must* we talk about Jerry?

PARKER: You'll feel better. Who is it this time?

ISABEL: Jerry's been home on leave for five days. But he's spent four of those five evenings with (*spacing the words*) that Fiske woman.

PARKER: Angela Fiske? The redhead with all the money?

ISABEL: Has she got money? She must have *some* attraction. Please understand me, Joe. It's not that I'm particularly jealous.

PARKER: No, of course not.

ISABEL: Jerry and I understand each other. He goes his way and I go mine. I may not be without admirers myself, if it comes to that.

PARKER: (*Quietly*) You've got no idea how true that is, Isabel.

ISABEL: Haven't I, Joe? Haven't I?

PARKER: (*Confused*) I mean —

ISABEL: No; I was thinking about poor Jerry. He may not always be lucky. He may meet some little girl who's not as broadminded as I am. And then, when he gives her the go-by . . .

(*Six shots, rapidly fired*)

ISABEL: Paul must be getting really furious, down in that cellar. Not hitting anything.

PARKER: He's using a lot of ammunition.

ISABEL: Now your trouble, Joe, is that you're too much of a gentleman. . . . (*Suddenly changing her tone*) And if you *really* want to see Jerry, there he is now.

PARKER: Where?

ISABEL: Just going down the path to the summerhouse. Look out the window.

PARKER: It's infernally bright out there.

ISABEL: Doesn't he look noble in his new uniform? Sam Browne belt and

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revolver and everything. Look how he turns round and waves his cap at us like a real soldier!

PARKER: Real soldiers don't exactly wave their caps, do they?

ISABEL: *He* does. (*Calling*) Jerry! *Jer*-ry!

(*Jerry Kenyon calls back from a distance*)

JERRY: Hello, there!

ISABEL: (*Calling*) Jerry, Joe Parker's here!

JERRY: (*As though unable to hear*) Who?

ISABEL: Joe Parker! He wants to see you.

JERRY: Well, give him a drink or something. I'll be up in a minute.

ISABEL: (*Tensely*) Into the summer house again. Not a care in the world, has he?

PARKER: Now listen, Isabel: you've got to slow down. You'll be crying again in a minute.

ISABEL: The — the light hurts my eyes.

PARKER: Then we'll pull down these linen window blinds. We'll still be able to see . . . There! How's that?

ISABEL: Better.

PARKER: Can I get you anything?

ISABEL: Oh, no. You heard the Great White Chief's orders. I'm to get *you* something. What will you have? Highball?

(*Two shots, spaced*)

PARKER: Don't bother about a drink.

ISABEL: It's no bother. The stuff's out in the dining-room here.

(*Three shots*)

ISABEL: (*From the adjoining room*) The iceman didn't deliver today of all days, and I'm afraid I can't give you any. I read in the paper yesterday that we're likely to have automatic ice boxes any day: you know, things that freeze ice by electricity or something. Do you believe that?

PARKER: I doubt it. But, listen, Isabel . . .

ISABEL: (*Returning to the library*) Here you are. Not very cold, but the best I could do.

PARKER: Thanks. What I wanted to say was: couldn't you get that brother of yours to give up practising now? Hasn't he done his good deed for the day?

(*A single shot*)

ISABEL: I'll ring for Kitty.

(*Sharp knock on door, which opens*)

KITTY: You don't have to call me, Mrs. Kenyon. I'm here.

ISABEL: Yes, Kitty? What is it?

KITTY: It's only to tell you there's another visitor. This time it's a woman.

ISABEL: *Lady*, Kitty! Call her a *Lady*, please!

KITTY: Well, ma'am, I wonder if you'll think so. She says her name's Fiske. Angela Fiske.

ISABEL: (*Startled*) Angela Fiske! Tell her I'm not in.

KITTY: It's too late, Mrs. Kenyon. She's comin' down the hall now.

ANGELA: (*Deferentially*) My *dear* Mrs. Kenyon!

ISABEL: How do you do, Angela? This is a friend of ours. Miss Fiske, Mr. Parker.

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ANGELA: I don't want to intrude, really I don't! I wouldn't have intruded for worlds, especially on a day like this . . . isn't it awful? . . . but your husband simply insisted. My dear Mrs. Kenyon, he simply wouldn't take no for an answer.

ISABEL: I'm sure he wouldn't.

ANGELA: Do you know what he's brought from his office, as a surprise?

ISABEL: No.

ANGELA: A phonograph recording machine! And he's going to let us use it!

ISABEL: So that we can all hear ourselves talk twice? How nice.

(*Four shots*)

ISABEL: In heaven's name, can't somebody stop that firing?

PARKER: (*Fiercely, under his breath*) Don't fly off the handle! Take it easy, now!

ISABEL: Kitty!

KITTY: Yes, ma'am?

ISABEL: Please go down in the cellar and tell my brother he's driving us all crazy. Tell him to stop!

KITTY: Yes, ma'am. (*She leaves*)

ANGELA: My dear Mrs. Kenyon, I do hope I haven't offended you in any way! I know I'm a silly little chatterbox. They say people who have red hair often are, and of course at your age you must find the heat very trying.

PARKER: Don't you think we'd all better sit down? (*Heartily*) I was very much interested in what Miss . . . Fiske said about a phonograph recording machine. Mrs. Kenyon — er — was just talking about a machine to make ice.

ANGELA: Isn't science wonderful? But I *do* think it was mean of Major Kenyon to invite me out here and then fall asleep in the summer house.

(*Two shots*)

ISABEL: (*Slowly*) Did you say . . . *fall asleep?*

ANGELA: Yes! Of course!

PARKER: But how do you know?

ANGELA: (*Surprised*) I came up the back way: I saw him in the summer house, with his head forward on the table.

PARKER: That's queer.

ANGELA: Of course I couldn't see much, except in the bright light at the door. But I *think* I saw him there.

ISABEL: I think I'd better go and look. (*She leaves*)

ANGELA: Oh, dear! Somehow I always manage to offend people, being so dependent and everything. Except men, of course. I couldn't offend *you*, Mr. Parker, could I?

PARKER: Madam, I'm not sure.

ANGELA: Of course, the person I really came to see was Paul, Mrs. Kenyon's brother. He's a little young, of course. But he's joining up next month . . . I think we should all do our bit, don't you? . . . and he has such a pleasant personality. I think he likes me. If he walked in at that door this minute . . .

(*Door flung violently open. Paul is*

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a tall, gawky young man of twenty)

PAUL: (*In a rush*) Now look here, sis. I think it was a low-down trick to interrupt a fellow's revolver practice just when I'd got to the point where . . . hullo!

ANGELA: Paul!

PAUL: Oh, lord! Are YOU here again?

PARKER: (*Placatingly*) Did you have a good day's shooting?

PAUL: (*Through his teeth*) Swell. One of the best.

PARKER: Hit the target?

PAUL: On the only shot that mattered, I hit the target dead center. (*Distantly, a shrill scream, then another*)

PAUL: That sounded like my sister!

PARKER: I think it *was* your sister. (*He runs to window, raises blind, looks out*)

PAUL: *What is it? What's wrong with you, over at that window?*

(*Music up*)

PARKER: (*Reflectively*) That was more than twenty-five years ago, Captain Burke.

BURKE: Yes. It's a long time.

PARKER: We found Jerry Kenyon lying across the table in the summer house. He'd shot himself through the head with his own revolver. It was lying on the floor beside him.

BURKE: Shot himself. I see.

PARKER: When Isabel found him, he'd been dead about half an hour.

BURKE: The doctors proved that?

PARKER: Yes. That shot had been fired against his head. The front of his uniform-cap was powder-burned where the bullet entered.

BURKE: There's no doubt about that?

PARKER: None at all. We never noticed the real shot because —

BURKE: Because that young lad was shooting like a maniac in the cellar.

PARKER: That's right. And now they're all dead. By accident, or illness, they're all gone. Isabel Kenyon died less than a year afterwards. I think she died just because she was so fond of Jerry. Er — I suppose you've guessed *my* little secret?

BURKE: I think I can read between the lines. You were in love with Isabel Kenyon, weren't you?

PARKER: Yes.

BURKE: Well, these things happen.

PARKER: I never let her see it, you understand!

BURKE: Women *know*.

PARKER: They're all gone — all but me. And I'm left alone with old tunes, and old ghosts, wondering *why* the fellow ever killed himself. (*Fiercely*) Why? Why? *Why?*

BURKE: Uh-huh.

PARKER: And this morning, out of a clear sky, I get this letter.

BURKE: "If you want to know how Major Kenyon really died, look in the third drawer of the desk in the library. Press hard at the back of the drawer." Are you going to do it?

PARKER: Naturally! I've got a key here somewhere that fits the drawer.

BURKE: Listen, Mr. Parker. In my father's country, in Ireland, they've got a saying that when a man's going to commit suicide, the devil comes in, and takes him by the

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hand, and talks to him. They say you can see the devil as plain as I see you . . . just before you pull the trigger.

PARKER: The devil must have been in the summer house *that* afternoon, then.

BURKE: Oh, no, he wasn't.

PARKER: What do you mean?

BURKE: Major Kenyon didn't kill himself. He was murdered.

(*Parker begins to laugh*)

BURKE: What's so funny?

PARKER: Because the police covered all that at the time. And everybody had an alibi.

BURKE: They did, did they?

PARKER: Well, think of what I've told you! Isabel and I were together all the time. Paul, her brother, was shooting constantly in the cellar. Angela Fiske —

BURKE: What about *her?*

PARKER: She had a chauffeur who drove her here, and he swore he saw her from the moment she left the car until she entered this house.

BURKE: So.

PARKER: Even Kitty the maid could prove she'd never stirred out of the house, until just a minute or so before Isabel went herself —

BURKE: Oh? And why did the maid have to leave the house at all?

PARKER: She was taking Jerry the black coffee he drank every afternoon. But remember, he'd already been dead half an hour then. And that disposes of everybody.

BURKE: Listen, Mr. Parker, I say Major Kenyon was murdered because I *know* he was murdered.

PARKER: By an outsider, of course.

BURKE: No. By one of the people in that house.

PARKER: That's impossible!

BURKE: Is it? Why don't you open that desk-drawer and see?

(*A clock strikes the three-quarter hour*)

BURKE: What's that?

PARKER: Only the clock. It's been kept running. Let's see — a quarter to eight.

BURKE: A quarter to eight? Then I haven't got much time!

PARKER: For what?

BURKE: Holy St. Patrick, *will* you open that drawer?

PARKER: If it's waited more than twenty-five years, my friend, it can wait another minute. I've got the key somewhere in this bunch. (*He goes on muttering to himself as he finds the key*) Everything the same. Paul didn't change after he inherited. Same old desk. Same old phonograph. Same old . . . I think this is the key. Yes! It opens. It's a deep drawer, Captain, but there's nothing in it!

BURKE: The letter says to press hard at the back. Have you tried that?

PARKER: It doesn't seem to . . . (*excitedly*) . . . Yes, by George, it does work!

BURKE: Well?

PARKER: There seems to be a movable back on a hinge.

BURKE: What's inside?

PARKER: Some sort of flat brown-paper parcel sealed with wax . . .

BURKE: Open it, man! Open it!

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PARKER: It's a phonograph record! (*Pause*) There's a plain white label and something written on it in pencil. But I don't see too well nowadays without my glasses.

BURKE: Give it to me. I'll read it to you. "A Record of How I killed Jerry Kenyon." (*Another pause*) Don't you get it, Mr. Parker? This is the real goods! The murderer's going to tell us his own story more than twenty-five years after the fact!

PARKER: Be careful! Whatever you do, don't drop it!

BURKE: You seem to be interested enough *now*.

PARKER: I don't say I'm not interested. I say I can't believe it!

BURKE: There's the phonograph. Put on that record and let's hear what the ghost says.

PARKER: Any of them could have made the record. The apparatus was all here.

BURKE: Won't the phonograph work?

PARKER: Oh, yes, it works.

BURKE: Is it wound up?

PARKER: Yes. It's wound up. (*With a deep breath*) Here goes.

BURKE: (*Suddenly apprehensive*) But look, Mr. Parker. Whose voice do you think it's going to be?

PARKER: I don't know.

BURKE: (*Urgently*) I ought to warn you. The voice you're going to hear is . . .

PARKER: Please be quiet and listen! I've started it!

(*A measured scratching, as of a needle on an imperfect surface*)

PARKER: (*Speaking to the phonograph*) Well? Speak up! Who killed Jerry Kenyon?

(*A woman's voice, clearly heard despite the scratching, seems to reply*)

VOICE: *I* killed him, Joe dear.

PARKER: Isabel!

BURKE: Mr. Parker, for the love of the Saints listen to me!

PARKER: S-h-h!

VOICE: I'm sorry about it, Joe. But I had to have you for an alibi. And you were so terribly easy to fool.

BURKE: It's only a phonograph record, man! Don't look at it as if it were alive!

VOICE: You said you and I were always together, Joe. But that wasn't quite true. I left you to go into the dining-room and mix a highball. Remember?

PARKER: (*Hoarsely*) Yes . . . yes . . .

VOICE: And I was carrying my big knitting-bag: Remember? But there was something else in it besides knitting. I'm an awfully good revolver-shot, Joe. I told you we were all good, except Paul. And the back windows of the dining-room face the same way as the back windows of the library.

PARKER: (*Bitterly*) Thank you, Isabel. Thank you very much.

VOICE: Jerry was in the summer house. I made a sign to him from the window, and he came to the door there. In bright sunlight, fifty feet away.

PARKER: So that was how you —

VOICE: Joe, don't you know what August heat is in a wooden summer

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house? Didn't you — didn't anybody — see that no man would be wearing a cap *inside — on a day like that?* Jerry had taken his cap off before he went into the summer house. We saw him do it. He was bareheaded when he came to the door. So I lifted the revolver and shot him through the head. Then I dropped the gun back in my knitting-bag, and went back to the library with your drink.

BURKE: (*Hoarsely*) I'm going to turn the thing off!

PARKER: Stay where you are!

BURKE: But it's not . . .

PARKER: I have a right to hear it.

BURKE: Then don't talk back to the thing, man, or you'll drive me crazy!

VOICE: There was something else in my knitting-bag, too. I had to use it. It was a duplicate of Jerry's Army cap, with a powder-burned hole already fired through it in exactly the place I wanted.

PARKER: Very clever of you, Isabel.

VOICE: I waited for some time, and then slipped out to "find" the body. I fitted the new cap over Jerry's head in the place where it ought to go. I put the old cap in my knitting-bag. I took his real revolver out of the holster and kept it. The gun that I'd used I dropped on the floor beside him. So I proved it was "suicide," you see.

PARKER: You proved it to *me.*

VOICE: Joe, listen. I'm very sick. They tell me I'm going to die.

PARKER: You *are* dead.

VOICE: Joe, I'm afraid. I'm going out in the dark, and I don't know what's there.

PARKER: Don't go away, Isabel! Come back! Just for a minute!

BURKE: I've had about enough of this.

VOICE: I want you to tell everybody about it, Joe. I want you to tell them how a jealous woman couldn't stand it any longer, and . . .

(*Voice and scratching stop abruptly*)

BURKE: There! It's cut off, and it's going to stay off.

PARKER: I've heard enough anyway. But you can't arrest her now, my friend. You can't arrest her now.

BURKE: I don't want to arrest anybody!

PARKER: Captain Burke, did you know what was on the record?

BURKE: Yes.

PARKER: And was that your idea of a joke?

BURKE: No, so help me! I may have been trying to have a little bit of fun with you at first . . .

PARKER: Ah!

BURKE: But I never guessed how you'd take it. Then, when I did try to tell you, you wouldn't listen. Man, don't you get it even yet?

PARKER: Yes, I get it.

BURKE: Oh, no, you don't. You don't see anything. That was how the fake "suicide" was managed, yes. That's just *how* it was all done, bar one or two little things. Only . . .

PARKER: Only what?

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BURKE: Only it wasn't Isabel Kenyon who committed the murder.

PARKER: What! Did I hear you correctly?

BURKE: You did.

PARKER: This is another of your little jokes, I suppose. Can't you let me alone?

BURKE: Hold it! You're going to hear the real truth now, if I have to hold you down in that chair. I know Mrs. Kenyon didn't kill her husband because I've just come from talking to the real murderer . . . up the river.

PARKER: But they're all dead!

BURKE: Oh, no, they're not. And I haven't got much time either. That clock's just going to strike eight.

PARKER: What's the time got to do with it?

BURKE: A good deal, if you'll follow me. Mrs. Kenyon died less than a year after her husband, didn't she?

PARKER: Yes.

BURKE: But it wasn't Mrs. Kenyon's voice you just heard on that record.

PARKER: WHAT?

BURKE: I'm telling you! The real murderer hated her. Hated her like poison. And wanted her blamed for the crime. When Mrs. Kenyon died, the real murderer wrote a letter to you . . .

PARKER: The letter I received today?

BURKE: Yes. But the murderer never dared to mail the letter. She made a lying "record" of Isabel Kenyon's voice as evidence. Now figure it out for yourself. Who *was* pretty enough to take Major Kenyon's eye, and strike back like fury when she got thrown over? Who wanted to go on the stage and "do impersonations"?

PARKER: *Kitty, the maid.*

BURKE: Now you understand!

PARKER: *She* shot Jerry from the dining-room window . . .

BURKE: Yes, it was Kitty who shot Mr. Kenyon from the dining-room window, a half-hour before Mrs. Kenyon ran out to the summer house. But a minute or two before Mrs. Kenyon ran out, Kitty took the black coffee out to the summer house, as she was accustomed to every afternoon. She carried the duplicate gun and the prepared cap wrapped in a napkin on the coffee tray — remember, she hadn't been able to get hold of Mrs. Kenyon's knitting-bag.

PARKER: She *did* go out just before Isabel — I remember!

BURKE: When Mrs. Kenyon entered the summer house, Kitty was still there, but it was dark inside and Mrs. Kenyon never noticed her. . . . Kitty kept the letter until the day before yesterday. Then one of the boys at Sing Sing —

PARKER: Wait a minute!

BURKE: One of the boys at Sing Sing, thinking he was doing a kind deed, put a stamp on it and mailed it.

PARKER: Did you say Sing Sing?

BURKE: Yes. They're electrocuting her tonight for the murder of a lover down at Collyer's Hook. But

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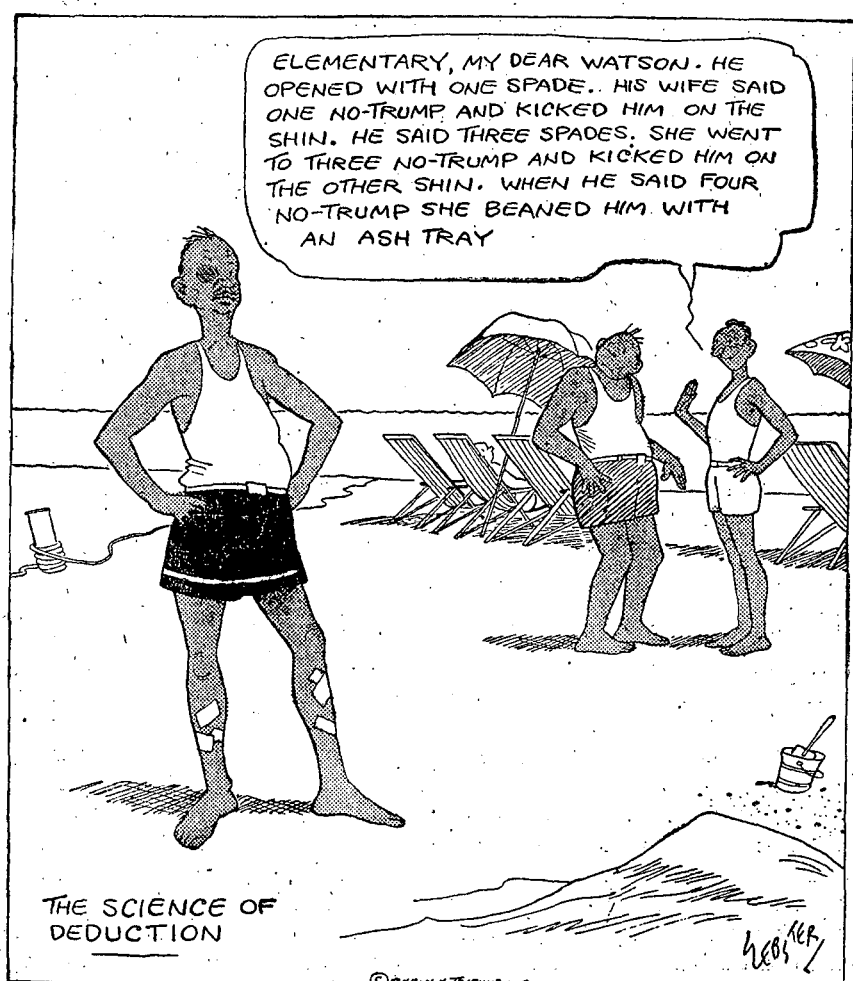
she made me promise to get that lying record and *destroy it* before they turn on the juice at eight o'clock. And here it goes — forever.

(*Crash of record breaking. The clock slowly strikes eight*)

(*Music up*)


ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON. HE OPENED WITH ONE SPADE. HIS WIFE SAID ONE NO-TRUMP AND KICKED HIM ON THE SHIN. HE SAID THREE SPADES. SHE WENT TO THREE NO-TRUMP AND KICKED HIM ON THE OTHER SHIN. WHEN HE SAID FOUR NO-TRUMP SHE BEANED HIM WITH AN ASH TRAY
THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION
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In 1903 Sir James Barrie performed what might be termed the playwrighting hat trick: he had three plays running concurrently on the London stage — QUALITY STREET, THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON, *and* LITTLE MARY. *We have no idea how many other playwrights made similar triple-plays unassisted — surely the number cannot be great; but we do know that another Englishman hit the threefold jackpot, this time on the New York stage. In December 1945 John van Druten had his name in lights on the marquees of three different theatres at one and the same time:* THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE, I REMEMBER MAMA, *and* THE MERMAIDS SINGING.

Like Elmer Rice, another contemporary playwright whose work has appeared in EQMM, John van Druten started his professional life as a lawyer but quickly deserted the bar for the theatre. Also like Elmer Rice, who was only 22 years old when his first play was successfully produced on Broadway, John van Druten was very young to wake up one morning and find himself famous: he was 24 when YOUNG WOODLEY *became a sensational hit on both sides of the Atlantic. Since then came such memorable plays as* THE DISTAFF SIDE, OLD ACQUAINTANCE, *and* THERE'S ALWAYS JULIET.

Mr. van Druten has been called a poet, a sophisticate, and a scholar. You will find a measure of each quality in Mr. van Druten's latest short story: the poetry of style, the sophistication of crime, and the intuitive scholarship that is always a subtle characteristic of the truly creative mind . . .

THE CAT'S-EYE

by JOHN VAN DRUTEN

THE trouble was that he could no longer disentangle what he remembered from what he had been told and what he had read. For he had, quite naturally, read every word that he could find on the subject, ever since they first told him about it when he was fourteen. And there had been a good deal published on it; not only books on famous crimes, which almost always had a chapter on the Cawthra case, but there had been a play and two novels based on it, and a movie based on one of the novels. Jim had read or seen them all.

It was only natural, then, that after all this time his memory and his reading should have become fused, and that he should no longer know which details came from which. The cat's-eye brooch; he knew that he remembered that, because of his childhood fear of it; but Mrs. Pamphlett, and Auntie Lilian's lace bedspread — did he really remember them? He thought he did, but he had read about them so often now, that he could no longer really be sure. It was twenty-seven years ago, and on the other side of the world, and he had been only

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seven at the time.

But at least Mrs. Pamphlett and the bedspread had existed, whereas there were other things that he thought he remembered, which he could not find in the accounts. Albert, for instance. There was no mention of him anywhere; yet he was sure that he remembered him. How did he fit into the story?

There was nobody to tell him, nobody he could ask. Everyone who could have known was dead, or else four thousand miles away. Except her, Auntie Vi-Vi, and nobody knew where she was. She had disappeared entirely after the trial; he had read in some book that she had gone to America; he supposed she would have changed her name. In any case, she was lost, and it was she alone who could have told him about these things for certain.

There had been an afternoon, for example, when he was on his way home from school, and he had run into her with Albert in the street, and she had walked back with him to the house, and asked him not to say anything about it, not to mention seeing Albert, not to anyone, especially his father. She had given him sixpence as a reward for his silence, and he had had quite a time deciding what to spend it on, for he had never had so much money in one lump before. That must have happened, surely? He couldn't have imagined a thing like that.

Here in Chicago in 1939, it was hard to believe that any of it had happened. Kilburn, the drab northwestern suburb of London, in 1912, seemed an improbable place in itself. Had he really lived in it, and gone to school in Salisbury Road, and bought Liquorice Allsorts at the sweetshop at the corner? What connection was there between that small boy and the married young insurance broker with thinning hair at thirty four, who lived in a small house in Evanston? None that he could see, except continuity, and that was the odd part of it.

He had been born in the United States, and his mother died in giving birth to him. When he was three, his father took him to England. He thought that he remembered the trip, but he was not sure. Perhaps it was the journey back that he was thinking of. In London, Auntie Lilian became his stepmother. He remembered her, or thought he did, as a tall, languid woman, with huge dreary eyes and untidy masses of black hair that seemed too heavy for her. She was given to invalidism and to lying on sofas, dressed in a tea gown, making lace; there seemed to be yards and yards of it, in his memory.

They lived in a semi-detached house, with dark, sooty evergreens in the front garden, in a long road of exactly similar dwellings. The house, in the photographs he had since seen of it in reports of the case, looked smaller than he remembered it. On the gate was his father's brass plate, announcing: FREDERICK C. CAWTHRA, TEACHER OF MUSIC.

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At the back of the house was an oblong piece of garden of which Mr. Cawthra was very fond. Jim used to potter with him on summer evenings when he did his gardening; digging plantains out of the patch of grass they called the lawn; fetching the trowel and the watering pot from the tool shed, trying to make himself useful.

Apart from those evenings, he seemed to spend most of his time in the kitchen, getting in the way of Annie, the general servant, or being regaled by her with stories of crime or illness; she had a large family which included a consumptive sister and an epileptic brother, and she loved to talk about them. The kitchen was in the basement, and there was always strong, sweet tea and cold bread-pudding.

Upstairs, the house was dark, summer and winter, for Auntie Lilian could not bear the sunlight and kept the shades drawn; from the back room came the sound of the piano, and the pupils practicing *The Maiden's Prayer* and *The Dance of the Little Silver Bells*. Sometimes a girl's voice would float out, singing "The Garden of Sleep," or "The Blue Alsatian Mountains." While these went on, Auntie Lilian would lie on her sofa with her eyes closed, dabbing Eau de Cologne on her temples, and say that it was all killing her. Sometimes when he was in bed at night, he would hear their raised voices below, quarreling.

Mr. Cawthra was a little man with a pointed beard and twinkling eyes. He was mild and jolly, and when he took Jim for walks they always had fun together. At first they used to go alone; later, Auntie Vi-Vi joined them. That was Jim's own name for her. Her real name was Violet Delcey. According to the books, his father met her in 1911, and she came to live with them the next year. She was a cashier in the local department store, called the Bon Marché, and came to Mr. Cawthra for music lessons. She had a sweet mezzo-soprano voice, and Jim thought her singing of the Flower Song from *Faust* the most beautiful thing he had ever heard.

Here again, he was not sure what he remembered and what he had read. The books described her as a quiet, modest, gentle-spoken girl, with Titian hair; one of them, more flowery than the rest, said that she had the pale, grave face of a Madonna. Jim thought that he remembered a tip-tilted nose, which gave her face a saucy look. According to the story, she became his father's mistress, and Auntie Lilian made scenes of violent jealousy, weeping and threatening to kill herself. Jim could almost swear now that he had heard her do so. According to the story, too, Violet Delcey felt her position very keenly and tried to break off the relationship and leave the house. Mr. Cawthra's evidence was that they ceased to be lovers, but that he begged her to stay on because she was so good with the child.

Good with him? Had she been,

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Jim wondered? It seemed, as he looked back, that they were always having secrets — secrets from his father and Auntie Lilian; that they used to call at houses when they went for walks alone, and have tea with servants in the kitchen, and that sometimes there were young men present, and a lot of giggling went on; and then on the way home, Auntie Vi-Vi would take him to a tea-shop for a threepenny ice, and tell him not to say anything at home about where they had been. And there was Albert, too. Albert was a sailor.

But on the other hand he could remember her reading aloud to him from the storybooks, sitting in the big armchair while he balanced on her lap, her arm around his waist, her red hair tickling his face; and when he had earache she used to come and sit on his bed, and bring him salt-bags and sing to him until the pain left him and he went to sleep.

She wore a brooch, which she told him was a cat's-eye, and this frightened him because he thought of the stone as being a real eye, extracted from a cat's head and in some way petrified. Even her reassurances, when he confessed to this after a nightmare, failed to remove his fear of the brooch completely; it remained a sinister thing in his memory, even now. He could not recall her wearing any other ornament, and saw her always in his mind as very neatly dressed, in a white blouse and plain gray skirt, and a patent-leather belt at her waist. This was the Violet Delcey of recorded fact; how did the Auntie Vi-Vi of his memory square with her?

In the summer of 1912 Auntie Lilian was taken ill — ill enough to have to stay in bed, this time. It was a hot summer, and Aunt Bet and Uncle Harvey were visiting them from America. They were relatives of Jim's own mother, childless, and they took to him at once. They stayed in a boarding-house just down the road, because the only spare room at home was the one in which Violet Delcey slept, and she was needed there to nurse and look after Auntie Lilian. Jim spent his days with them, and presently moved over to the boarding-house altogether, because the house was upset with illness and he was in the way. After Jim had been with them a little while, Aunt Bet asked him how he would like to go back to America with them.

"We planned to adopt you almost as soon as we saw you," she told him, when she was giving him the whole history some years afterwards. "You were so like poor Gertrude, and such an unhappy-looking little boy. It wasn't any fit household for a child to be brought up in. We could see that, the minute we arrived, even though your Aunt Lilian was sick in bed, and Violet Delcey was taking care of her and keeping out of everybody's way. But I caught a couple of looks between her and your father that told me all I needed to know, so we spoke to him about it — about taking you back with us, I mean — and he didn't make any objection. Of course, at

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that time, we hadn't the least idea what was going to happen."

After a couple of weeks in London, his uncle and aunt went on a trip to Scotland, where Uncle Harvey's family had come from, two generations back. Jim went with them, and it was while they were away that Auntie Lilian died. They hurried back to London. Jim thought he could remember the funeral, and being given seedcake to eat, and Auntie Vi-Vi wearing black, with a large black hat that had a big pearl hatpin in it.

At any rate, it was two weeks later, so Aunt Bet told him, that they sailed for America, and after that there was the house in Rockford, Illinois, and school, and new playfellows; a new life and new interests. Everything was different. He missed his father sometimes, and when he asked for him, Aunt Bet said, "You're our boy now," and took him into the kitchen, where she gave him something to eat. One day she told him that his father was dead. He was surprised, and worked himself up into crying a little in bed that night. Then he forgot him.

It was when he was fourteen that Aunt Bet told him the whole story. Uncle Harvey had died two years before, and she herself was ill at the time. She must have known or guessed that she had not long to live. She sent for him to come to her room, on a sweltering summer afternoon and, sitting up in the double bed, pushing the streaks of her gray hair off her damp, red forehead, she told him as kindly as she could the facts of the Cawthra case.

"It's a dreadful thing I've got to tell you, Jim, and I've dreaded having to do it, ever since you came to live with us. But if I don't tell you, somebody else will, and not in a nice way, either."

He sat on his chair by her bedside, and fidgeted. He wanted to be out with the other boys, and not in here listening to her.

"Come up on the bed, Jim," she said, "and give me your hand."

He seated himself on the high bed, and put his hand unwillingly into hers, which was moist and work-scarred.

"It's about your father," she said, "and I don't know how to tell you now any better than I'd have done in the beginning, even though I've had seven years to think about it. Your father was hanged, Jim; he was hanged for murdering your Aunt Lilian; and that's all there is to it. And you'd better know it from me than from gossiping busybodies later on."

Father; Auntie Lilian; it was so long now since he had thought of them. Their names brought back another life: the dark house with the drawn shades, and the sound of the piano from the back room.

"It all happened that summer we were over there and brought you back with us. It's all dead and forgotten, and I hope you'll never think about it, any more than you can help or will have to. Uncle Harvey and I made you our own son from that time on, and gave you our name, for

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your poor mother's sake, and it hasn't anything to do with you, except that it did happen, and he was your father, God forgive him."

She was sparing with the details, telling him only that it was poison — some kind of weed-killer, she said. Jim, with a memory of the summer evenings when they used to spray the stunted rosebushes to destroy the green-fly, could not escape a childish picture of his father turning the syringe on Auntie Lilian, or forcing her to drink from the bucket into which the syringe was dipped.

"Why did he do it?" he asked. "Why did he want to kill her?"

"It was on account of that girl. Violet Delcey. He wanted to marry her."

Jim, who was by then beginning to be acquainted with the facts of sex, wondered whether his aunt was using a euphemism out of regard for his supposed innocence. He blushed; this part of the story affected him more than any other.

After that, Aunt Bet refused to talk about it. He knew enough, she said. When she went to the hospital to have her operation the next year, she told Jim that if anything happened to her he would find the press clippings about his father in an envelope in a secret drawer in the bureau.

"You can read them or not, as you want," she said. "Your Uncle and I kept them for when you were old enough to know about it all."

Nothing did happen to her then except to return from the hospital and linger another year in pain. But Jim read the clippings all the same. She had hardly left the house before he did so, kneeling on one of the green plush chairs in the living room, with the faded sheets of newspaper spread on the table cover before him. He read them greedily and guiltily, as though they were a dirty book.

For weeks he was terrified — terrified at the memory of the little house, and of his picture of his father stealing out to the toolshed that he so clearly remembered, getting the weed-killer from the shelf, and mixing it with Auntie Lilian's medicine, carrying it up the narrow stairs to her room. Worse were the descriptions of Auntie Lilian's symptoms, the exhumation, and the post-mortem examination. They were appalling, but they fascinated him, and he gloated over the details in his room at night.

Now, it was all a tale so old and so familiar that it was like a book that he had read too many times. The story of the murder was simple enough. Auntie Lilian was taken ill in July, 1912. The doctor attended her, and diagnosed gastritis. He prescribed medicine, and within a couple of weeks she was better. It was during those weeks that Violet Delcey nursed her. When she was out of danger, Violet went on a holiday.

This, Jim figured, must have been about the time that he himself was in Scotland with his aunt and uncle. Mr. Cawthra and his wife were alone in the house with Annie. Auntie

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Lilian was up again, and spending her time on the sofa, taking a tonic that the doctor had ordered her three times a day. Mr. Cawthra used to pour it out for her. Suddenly, she had a relapse; the former symptoms returned, and in three days she was dead. The doctor gave a death certificate, and the funeral took place at Kensal Green, Violet Delcey returning from her holiday specially for it. It was clear she had nothing to do with the murder.

Two weeks after the funeral (which must, Jim reckoned, have been just after he himself left for America), she returned to the house to live, chaperoned now only by Annie. Auntie Lilian's friends were scandalized, and one of them, a Mrs. Pamphlett, paid a visit to the house to question Annie about what was going on. Finding Violet Delcey absent, she went on a tour of inspection and discovered that the girl had moved into the best bedroom, and that Mr. Cawthra was sleeping in the little room that she had occupied.

This, thought Mrs. Pamphlett, was outrageous, but what was worse was that across the bed, the marriage bed in which her poor friend had breathed her last, and in which her supplanter was now sleeping, was a lace bedspread that Auntie Lilian had finished making just before she died and had promised to Mrs. Pamphlett. She had a further conference with Annie, who had taken a dislike to Violet Delcey since she became mistress of the house. Encouraged, Annie now voiced dark suspicions; other friends joined in, and an exhumation order was applied for. Arsenic was found in large quantities in the body, and the police paid a visit to the house. They found the weed-killer in the tool shed, but they did not find Mr. Cawthra and Violet Delcey. They had fled.

They were discovered ten days later in Boulogne, living as father and daughter in a tiny *-pension*, where they might have remained completely unsuspected, had not Violet Delcey had occasion to visit a dentist and objected to going to a French one. There was one English dentist in the town, and it happened that he had that day seen the police description in the London papers. It was the cat's-eye brooch which gave her away; the dentist recognized it and communicated with the police. Faced with them, Mr. Cawthra confessed his guilt immediately, but stated passionately that Violet Delcey knew nothing about it. After some trouble, they were extradited and brought home to stand their trials.

These were brief in the extreme. Mr. Cawthra persisted in his plea of guilty, all hope and interest seeming to have deserted him. "I did it," he said in his statement to the police, "and even if I hadn't, now that she knows I've been accused of it, there couldn't be any possibility of happiness for us. She's all I care about in life." The rest of the statement was concerned with establishing her innocence. It was the only thought he had left. Her trial as an accessory followed

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his by a couple of days, and she was acquitted without witnesses being called. Three weeks later he was hanged at Pentonville.

It was Mr. Cawthra's single-mindedness and his solicitude for her that appealed to the public imagination, turning him almost into a hero and a martyr, and giving to what would otherwise have been a sordid and commonplace story of wife-poisoning an enduring quality of tragedy and romance. It was this angle, too, that attracted the dramatist and the novelists who fictionized it; all three told the same essential story, with the same central characters: the nagging, fretful, or shrewish wife; the mild, agreeable little husband who murdered her from motives of respectability, so that he could marry the other woman whom he loved with a tenderness and an intensity that flooded the drab suburban background like a radiance; and the girl herself, meek, shrinking, and refined, inspiring by her gentleness and her devotion a depth of passion that she could never have dreamed of, dragged by it into the tragic whirlpool of the flight and the trial.

The story and its interpretation were so familiar to Jim now that, like the public at large, he accepted them without question. All that bothered him was the puzzle of how to resolve the inconsistency of the two figures — the Violet Delcey of fact and fiction, and the gay, mysterious Auntie Vi-Vi of his recollections. He would have liked to be able to assure himself that those recollections were untrustworthy; in his heart, he knew that they were not.

But in any case, it was all so long ago. So much had happened since then, to him as well as to the world. He was married to a wife who knew nothing of the case or his connection with it; he had a house, and a job, and the future to worry about; what did the dead remote past matter? It mattered only to the playwrights and the novelists, and to the compilers of books on criminology; to himself, it was hardly more, now, than would have been a mystery story he had read in his childhood and left without reaching the solution, in a volume long since lost and out of print.

And then one afternoon he saw her. It was in a department store in St. Louis, which he was visiting on business. She was standing at a counter a few feet away from him, and at the first glance he was certain that it was she. She had aged, changed, and filled out, and her Titian hair had faded to a pale ginger, but the tilt of her nose, the discontented, down-drawn line of her mouth, and the flat, level setting of her eyes in her face took him back suddenly across the years to his little room in the house in Kilburn, where she used to come and sit on his narrow bed and sing to him.

The next moment, doubt assailed him. Was it really she? How could he be sure? He could not possibly remember, after all this time. He stared at her, and his doubt grew. He was

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crazy to think of it; it was ridiculous to suppose that he would know her any more. And then, as he was about to abandon the idea, she turned towards him, and he saw that she was wearing a cat's-eye brooch, the brooch that used to frighten him in childhood.

Jim felt as though his heart had stopped for a moment; then it began to beat violently, choking him in his throat. She had passed him by, now, and was making for the street. In a moment she would be lost to him. He hurried after her, leaving his order uncompleted at the counter. As he went, he tried to think how he should greet her. If he said: "Aren't you Violet Delcey?" she would be certain to deny it.

He came abreast with her at the entrance to the store, and, as she was about to pass him, he said casually — as casually as he could for the excitement that was throttling him: "Hello, Auntie Vi-Vi!"

She started violently, and looked around to see who had spoken. He was smiling at her, with a nerve twitching uncontrollably at the corner of his mouth.

"Were you speaking to me?" she asked.

The moment she spoke, he knew her voice, English, and pseudo-refined, with impure vowel sounds. He had not heard a voice like that for years.

"Yes. Don't you remember me?" he said.

She looked at him for a moment and then dropped her eyes, assuming the indignation of a woman who is being accosted.

"No, I don't," she answered, and started to move on.

He caught at her arm.

"It's Jim — Jim Cawthra," he said, speaking the name he had not borne for nearly thirty years.

And now she turned to him again, her eyes widening, and her mouth falling open in surprise.

"Jim!" she breathed in amazement. "Not little Jim?"

"That's me," he said.

He could see that she was trembling as she tried to laugh and to treat the situation as a social coincidence.

"Well!" she said, but her voice was shaking, too.

"Can't we go somewhere and talk?" he asked, urgently. "I want to talk to you."

They went to a place near the store, choosing it because it was dark and empty, and seated themselves in a far corner. Violet Delcey ordered a banana split. She had put on a good deal of weight in the years; she was plump now, and matronly, and her face had lost the delicate contours that he remembered. It was the face of a resentful, self-indulgent woman.

"How did you recognize me?" she asked. "You were only a little boy when I last saw you. I've changed, too. How did you know me?"

"By that." He pointed to the brooch.

She squinted down at it.

'Oh, that!" she said. "Well, fancy your remembering that!"

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"It used to scare me, don't you remember? I used to think it was a real cat's eye."

"Did you?" she said. "How silly! I don't know why I still wear it. It isn't very pretty. Habit, I suppose. It's sort of silly, too, seeing it was that that really gave the show away before."

She gave a little laugh, and he stared at her. This could not be Violet Delcey speaking. But it could be Auntie Vi-Vi; he rememberd that laugh: it recalled to him the afternoons in other people's kitchens and the giggling conversations with the servants.

"Do you live here in St. Louis?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I'm not telling," she said. "I'm not telling you anything about me now."

"I wouldn't give you away."

"Well, that's as may be," she said, and the phrase struck him as odd and old-fashioned. "But I'm not taking any chances. What I was, or used to be, is all over, and no one knows about it. I wouldn't have come here with you now, except that — well, you're different. You were only a kid, and it's nice to get a chance to talk about old times, just for once."

"Do you think about it — much?" he asked. It was something he had long wondered about.

Again she shook her head.

"Not really," she said. "No. Now and then, of course, I suppose you can't help it, but it doesn't do you any good."

She took a spoonful of whipped cream. He could not think of what to ask her, what to say next. What did he want to know? "Was it awful?" That was really what he wanted to say, but it sounded such a silly question. Besides, what could she answer? Yes or no — neither would take him any further. He wanted to know what it had meant to her — what it felt like to have lived through all that she had lived through and to have come out on the other side, as she had done; but he could think of no way of putting the question so that she would understand it.

"Will you tell me about it?" he asked, at length. It was the best he could do.

"What? What do you want to know?"

He could not say. He thrust for a question of fact, rather than of point of view.

"Did you ever suspect what he had done? He never *told* you, did he?"

"No, of course he didn't. He didn't want me to know. That was the whole point. He knew I wouldn't have anything to do with him if I did."

"But when you were looking after her — the first time she was sick? He'd already started then, hadn't he?"

"Oh, that was only to make her ill enough to have the doctor in. For the sake of the death certificate the next time, you know. At least, that's how I figured it out afterwards. I suppose there was weedkiller in the medicine he used to pour out and give me to

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take up to her. But he always used to pour it out himself, and never let me do it. Just so that I couldn't be mixed up in it, I expect. He was always very thoughtful of me."

"Did you love him?" The questions were beginning to come of their own accord now.

Violet Delcey stared at him.

"Love him?" she repeated, incredulously. "How could I have loved him? He was old enough to be my father. But he was always respectful to me. And kind. You wouldn't believe how kind he was. Of course, he was crazy about me."

"But you *were* his mistress, weren't you?"

She looked offended. "Mistress? I don't know what you mean," she said.

There was no point in pursuing that.

"When you went away together — when you ran away — what did you think?" he asked. "He didn't tell you then what was wrong?"

"No. Of course, I knew there was trouble. I caught that Mrs. What's-her-name in the kitchen one day, talking to the skivvy. That girl had always hated me, and taken Mrs. Cawthra's side against me, and I guessed that she'd been saying things, so it wasn't any surprise to me when Freddie came and said there was a lot of gossip going on, and that it would be a good idea if we were to go away for a while till it had blown over. He said we could get married on the Continent. We were *going* to get married, you know," she went on. "I wouldn't have had anything to do with him in the first place if we hadn't been. Right from the beginning, he said he wanted to marry me, and that he would, as soon as *she* died. She was always being ill, you know, and I think he sort of hoped from the beginning that she wouldn't last. I suppose he got tired of waiting, same as I did."

"What — what do you mean?" Jim stammered.

"Well, wouldn't *you* have? I told him that I wasn't going to put up with it any longer. I mean, I wasn't getting any younger, and I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life just waiting for her to die."

"And what did *he* say?"

"Oh, he cried," she said, lightly. "Said he couldn't live without me, and if I'd only give him a little time, he'd see if he couldn't do something about a divorce, or something. So I said I'd give him three months, and after that I'd have to give Mr. Joplin his answer."

"Mr. Joplin?"

"Yes, don't you remember Joplin's, the paper shop? Old Joplin had been after me for ages."

A forgotten cupboard opened in Jim's memory. He saw a tall, stooping figure with thin streaks of hair plastered on a shiny scalp, steel-rimmed spectacles, and a prominent Adam's apple, giving him the pink, paper "Books for the Bairns" in exchange for his weekly penny. Old Joplin; he hadn't thought of him for years.

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"Were you going to marry *him*?" he asked.

"Well, I might have. He had a nice little business, and he was crazy about me, and I wasn't getting any younger. That's what I told Freddie, and he saw my point."

"When was that?"

"Oh, about a month before she was taken queer."

It was odd to hear the old expressions again.

"It wasn't till we were in France that I really began to put two and two together, but by that time there wasn't anything I could do. Of course, I knew there was nothing against me, but it did look bad. I was scared to death of the trial, because you never know how they can twist things, those lawyers, but *he* saw to it that it was all right. I knew he would, of course. I knew that I could trust him. He was always the gentleman, your father was."

She looked at her watch.

"Here, I've got to go," she said.

"Not yet," Jim pleaded.

"I must." She began gathering up her things.

"Tell me just one thing more," he asked.

"What?"

"Who was Albert?" That memory had to be cleared up.

She looked at him blankly.

"Albert?" she repeated. "I don't remember any Albert."

"He was a sailor."

Recognition came into her face.

"Oh, Albert," she said, laughing. "Fancy you remembering him. Yes. Albert — what *was* his other name? I've forgotten."

"Who was he?"

"He was a friend of mine. He treated me very badly, Albert did. That was the time I first started going to Freddie for singing lessons. I was having trouble with Albert, and I remember one day when I had a headache, it all sort of got too much for me, and I began crying, and Freddie tried to comfort me. That's how it all started, really. I mean, he sort of asked me questions, and I told him all about it, and that's what really started him getting keen on me, I think. Funny, I'd forgotten all about Albert."

"But you went on seeing him. I remember meeting you with him, and your telling me not to say anything about it at home."

"Well, I didn't want to upset Freddie, when he was being so kind to me," she said. "I was supposed to have been all through with Albert, and I didn't want to worry Freddie, knowing that I wasn't. I remember wondering whether I'd hear from Albert when the trouble came, but of course I didn't. He was a bad lot, really, but he was very good-looking, and he had a way with him. I wonder what's become of him."

A thought seemed to strike her suddenly, and she smiled, looking down at the cat's-eye brooch.

"What is it?" Jim asked. "Have you thought of something?"

"I've just remembered," she said.

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"It was Albert gave me this brooch. Funny, my forgetting that!"

She fingered the brooch, and then unpinned it, taking it out and looking at it as though she had not seen it for a long time. It was a meager little thing, Jim thought; queer that it should have seemed sinister to him all these years.

"Yes," she said, as she replaced it. "He said it was good luck, or something. Well, I dare say it has been. I've been lucky. Did I tell you I was married, by the way?"

"No," said Jim.

"Oh, yes, I've been married nearly twenty years," she said. "He really does very well. We're getting one of the new Plymouths next month. I haven't done badly for myself. There is just one drawback, though, to no one knowing who I am."

"What's that?" Jim Cawthra asked.

"Well," she said, a smug and almost coy look coming into her face. "You see, they don't know, and looking at me now, no one would believe that I was once good enough for a man to commit a murder and get himself hung for me. But," she sighed philosophically, "I suppose you can't have everything."

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SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

IT IS every reviewer's dream that he will recognize genius and penetrate pretentiousness — and his nightmare that he won't. How have mystery critics of the past fared with some of the classics in the field? This department (by no means insensible to the malicious possibilities of the quest) has recently indulged in a little quiet checking-up in this matter, with results that can only be described as mixed.

In the beginning was Poe. Surely, anyone would think, the critics must have enjoyed a field day when he blazed the detection trail with his three Auguste Dupin tales back in the 1840's. *Au contraire*, as the limerick has it. For several years now I have been searching the contemporary prints, and nowhere (I cheerfully invite correction) have I found a specific criticism or review, within the meaning of the act, of any of the Dupin stories upon the occasion of its first appearance. This cannot be laid solely to the circumstance that they were short stories. *The Purloined Letter* made its bow in THE GIFT: 1845, a popular pre-dated "annual" issued in the autumn of 1844. I have seen several detailed reviews of this volume, including one over a column in length in the "New York Tribune" for October 4, 1844; but in none of these is there any comment on Poe's tale. In short, the great Dupin was born into a critical vacuum.

Wilkie Collins' immortal MOONSTONE fared better. In the sedate London "Athenaeum" for July 25, 1868 I have discovered what may well be the first full-length mystery review. To be sure, the anonymous critic deplores "the somewhat sordid detective element" in Collins' tale, and he does not always select for his admiration the same qualities esteemed by modern readers. But taking his pioneer estate into account, we must give him high marks for his perception of the novel's

> . . . carefully elaborate workmanship, and the wonderful construction of the story; the admirable manner in which every circumstance and incident is fitted together, and the skill with which the secret is kept to the last; so that even when all seems to have been discovered there is a final light thrown upon people and things which gives them a significance they had not before.

"In 1887," according to Dorothy Sayers, Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes story, A STUDY IN SCARLET, "was flung like a bombshell into the

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field of detective fiction." If Miss Sayers is correct, this must surely be one of the earliest instances on record of a delayed-action bomb; for my researches over a period of years (again I welcome correction) have failed to unearth anything closer to a bona-fide review of the work than a one-line "notice" of BEETON'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL (in which the tale appeared) in the "Publishers' Circular" for December 6, 1887. For the first authentic review of a Sherlock Holmes story we must turn to his second appearance, the well-loved THE SIGN OF FOUR. Here we strike pay-dirt. The review in question, unsigned, and found in the "Athenaeum" for December 6, 1890, is remarkable on so many counts that nothing less than quotation in full will suffice:

> A detective story is usually lively reading, but we cannot pretend to think that THE SIGN OF FOUR is up to the level of the writer's best work. It is a curious medley, and full of horrors; and surely those who play at hide and seek with the fatal treasure are a strange company. The wooden-legged convict and his fiendish misshapen little mate, the ghastly twins, the genial prizefighters, the detectives wise and foolish, and the gentle girl whose lover tells the tale, twist in and out together in a mazy dance, culminating in that mad and terrible rush down the river which ends the mystery and the treasure. Dr. Doyle's admirers will read the little volume through eagerly enough, but they will hardly take it up again.

By the time that E. C. Bentley's classic TRENT'S LAST CASE (first issued in America as THE WOMAN IN BLACK) made its appearance in 1913, mystery criticism had become more general, if not yet specialized or professional. In England the "Spectator's" review of this work held that Mr. Bentley was "to be congratulated on a decided success"; while our old friend the "Athenaeum" contented itself with: "An excellent detective story." American reviewers were less prescient. The "Boston Transcript" thought the tale ingenious enough, but found "many, many pages during whose reading the reader's attention continually lags." Acknowledging the novel as "one of the few good detective stories in recent years," the "Nation" nevertheless assailed its "technical faults." It remained for the "Bookman" to complain that the author "just fails of making Philip Trent a personality" — this of the work that later historians have credited with changing the whole course of the detective novel by its introduction of "character." Not even the most favorable of the reviews showed any real perception of the extent to which Bentley was in advance of his time, or the qualities that have enabled his masterpiece to survive the years.

Few detective stories have approached the prestige or popularity of the Philo Vance novels by S. S. Van Dine in the 1920's. Times have changed, and today Ogden Nash's dictum concerning the mannered sleuth's need for a kick in the pance has become a byword. Whatever the

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merits of this controversy, the first Van Dine novel was THE BENSON MURDER CASE, published in 1926; or just twenty years ago. Although the tone of the reviews was predominantly worshipful, the chorus was not unanimous. Siege gun of the attacking forces was a reviewer in the "Saturday Review of Literature" for January 15, 1927. No punch-puller, this critic asserted that there would have been no mystery at all had Van Dine permitted the legal authorities in the book "to follow the most rudimentary police routines. But then what would there have been for the gifted Vance to do?" As for Philo, he reminded the reviewer of "a high school girl who has been studying the foreign words and phrases in the back of the dictionary"; while the sleuth's "exposition of the technique employed by a gentleman shooting another gentleman who sits six feet in front of him deserves a place in a *How to be a detective by mail* course." The statement that District Attorney Markham served only one term in office was pronounced the most credible in the novel, and the review closed with this tender parting shot: "The book is written in the little-did-he-realize style." The reviewer was a former private detective, a writer for the pulp magazines, whose own revolutionary novels were still a few years away. His name was Dashiell Hammett.

The weakness in Hammett's argument, of course, is that in insisting on the yardstick of literal realism, he denies to Van Dine the artistic license so necessary for acceptance of his, Hammett's, superb hardboiled but equally unrealistic detective romances. For a delightful comparison of the private investigator in fiction and in fact (a subject too long neglected) I recommend *Peekaboo Pennington, Private Eye* by John Bartlow Martin in "Harper's" for May 1946.

Mostly About People: Mystery readers and writers alike were saddened by the death, at 41, of Kurt Steel, author of the Hank Hyer stories. His integrity as a craftsman and warm friendliness as a person will not soon be forgotten. . . . New officers of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., as that lively young organization begins its second year: Ellery Queen, President; Lawrence Treat, Vice-President; Ken Crossen, Secretary; Helen McCloy, Treasurer. . . . Thanks to all the readers who wrote me about the origin of "whodunit". . . . The honor (if you can call it that) belongs to Don Gordon, American News Company oracle, who invented the expression in 1928. . . . Erstwhile claimant Wolfe Kaufmann has withdrawn from the contest. . . . Nero's back and Viking's got him. Rex Stout's first full-length Wolfe & Archie mystery since 1940 will be issued in October. It will be called THE SILENT SPEAKER.

Crimes Across My Desk: After a long drought, the woods are suddenly full of anthologies and collections; so many, in fact, that I can only report

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on the high spots. . . . Patterned after the famous London Detection Club anthologies, MURDER CAVALCADE (Duell) presents twenty selections by as many luminaries of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., in a generous volume notable for its freshness and variety, with healthy servings of fiction, true crime, and criticism. . . . To send readers of EQMM hurrying to their booksellers, I need only relate that TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE (Little, Brown) consists of thirty-six stories representing, in Ellery Queen's judgment, the cream of the 236 tales which appeared in this magazine during its first four years. The volume thus supplements the editors' great — and I use the word advisedly — 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT, published in 1941, still available at this writing in a Garden City reprint, and scheduled for canonization this Fall as a Modern Library Giant. . . . A longtime disbeliever that true crime can be as entertaining as the fictional variety, I found my conviction wavering before Edward D. Radin's TWELVE AGAINST THE LAW (Duell). One reason lies in the author's clear and straightforward reporting, agreeably free of the Woollcottian posturing that has marred so much recent book-writing about real-life felony; another is his happy choice of contemporary cases that haven't been done-to-death. . . . As its title implies, Will Cuppy's MURDER WITHOUT TEARS (Sheridan) is occupied with the lighter aspects of homicide. Most of the modern selections perform the assignment pleasantly and without undue coyness, but the 100-odd pages from THE NEWGATE CALENDAR could have been reduced to ten with profit. . . . That Cornell Woolrich-William Irish is one of the few genuine stylists today in the crime-detective short story is no news to readers of this family journal. THE DANCING DETECTIVE by "Irish" (Lippincott) brings together seven of his macabre and suspenseful tales in a collection no lover of good craftsmanship should miss.

Once-lightly-over the recent novels. . . . Though not strictly a mystery, Gerald Butler's MAD WITH MUCH HEART (Rinehart) offers the tautest suspense since THE UNSUSPECTED. . . . In the light-hearted espionage bracket, place DANGEROUS HONEYMOON by Axel Kielland (Little, Brown) near the top. . . . Ditto for CHEAT THE HANGMAN by E. X. Ferrars (Crime Club) if you prefer your whodunits patient, British, and mental. . . . Four comedies of manners, American-style, I can recommend are Patrick Quentin's PUZZLE FOR FIENDS (S. & S.), Lucy Cores' LET'S KILL GEORGE (Duell), Jonathan Stagge's DEATH'S OLD SWEET SONG (Crime Club), Richard Sale's BENEFIT PERFORMANCE (S. & S.). . . . And three above-average entertainments for the hammock-and-chocolates trade: Mignon Eberhart's FIVE PASSENGERS FROM LISBON (Random), Leslie Ford's HONOLULU STORY (Scribner), Patricia Wentworth's PILGRIM'S REST (Lippincott).

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A certain school of social science in New York City announced the following course in its Spring 1946 catalog: THE MYSTERY STORY, *Thursday 6:00–8:00 p.m. — Instructor: Dashiell Hammett. The course, according to the description in the brochure, was primarily directed to writers and potential writers of mystery stories. It promised to discuss the history of the mystery story, the relationship between the detective story and the general novel, and the possibilities of the detective story as a progressive medium in literature (we confess that we still do not understand clearly the nature of those possibilities). In addition the course would consider such craft problems as characterization, mood, and structure, as well as analyze the detective story in motion pictures, theatre, and radio through the work of some of the most important writers in these fields. The course was scheduled to run from May 2 through June 27, with one session omitted because of the Decoration Day holiday.*

Well, we read that prospectus and found it irresistible. So, on the night of May 2, your Editor walked boldly into the registration office of the school and asked to enroll as a student. We expected no difficulties: the school went on record as being "a school for the people . . . [with] no requirements for admission and . . . open to everyone without regard to race, nationality, creed or political belief." Nevertheless, we were refused admittance to the class, and by no less a person than the head Registrar herself. Her reason? You would never guess in a million years. She simply didn't believe we were Ellery Queen! Although what difference that should have made we have not yet been able to figure out.

So, accompanied by Mildred Falk, Managing Editor of EQMM, we elevatored up to the classroom and met Dashiell Hammett pacing nervously in the corridor. Mr. Hammett restored our faith in human behavior in jig time: he welcomed us with open arms and literally shanghaied your Editor into THE MYSTERY STORY. *Whereas we had originally intended to sit back and listen, as a humble student of the genre, we suddenly found ourselves a combination visiting consultant and guest expert — and if we do say so, a good time was had by all. Somehow or other, neither Hammett nor your Editor got round to discussing much history or analyzing many craft problems, but the open-forum free-for-all that ensued week after week touched importantly on most aspects of the detective story and its technical and commercial pitfalls; and the all-night bull-and-brandy sessions we*

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spent with Dashiell Hammett after each weekly class will be forever amber in your Editor's memory.

You will recall that the course was directed primarily to writers and potential writers. And therein lies the purpose of this reminiscence. Your Editor and EQMM are deeply interested in new writers; as we have said many times, EQMM's editorial door is always open — wide open — to talented beginners. More ardently than any other editor in the field we encourage 'tec tyros to strut their stuff, and when that stuff has what it takes, we publish it. Yes, we offer baptism in print to all deserving new writers, young or old, male or female, without regard to race, nationality, creed or political belief. Do you have the slightest doubt in your mind as to the honesty and sincerity of our editorial openmindedness? Then listen . . .

At the close of the third session in Mr. Hammett's course a young lady approached us and offered the manuscript of a short story for Ellery Queen's personal consideration. She started writing the story after the first lecture. Your Editor read the story and found it promising. We suggested certain changes: in the character of the detective, in the plot construction, and in the title. The young lady rewrote the story, resubmitted it, and lo! — we purchased it. So we say again to all beginners, everywhere in the world: it can happen here. If you have talent, if you have the will and the patience and the consuming desire to be a detective-story writer, find courage and encouragement in EQMM's acceptance of Hazel Hills's first published story — and mail a submission to EQMM's Second Annual Prize Contest which closes October 20 this year.

THE UNLOCKED ROOM

By HAZEL HILLS

AROUND the breakfast table that winter-weary Sunday the three heirs gloomed, each in his own representative manner. Leonard, small, sphinx-faced, and neat as a blueprint, smoked his pipe with an air of control, doubtless thinking in methodical terms of stress, tensile strength, and gauges. His sister, Kay, blonde and bland, sat listless, her smooth face cupped in capable fingers. Frank, their cousin, exploded words and action, getting up and reseating himself, flicking cigarette ashes carelessly, all with deliberate dramatics.

"This is typical of Aunt Katharine! She's a damned tyrant with all her senseless edicts. Under penalty of

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being disinherited, we must be at breakfast by the ungodly hour of eight o'clock, but *she* can take her time, keep *us* waiting hours!"

Kay's voice was slowly amiable; only a swinging slender foot hinted at tension. "Oh, come now, that's a little exaggerated. We've only been waiting twenty minutes. Although I admit I'm perishing for coffee. But must you work yourself into such a frenzy, Frank? Every time we're here for the weekend, I'm afraid you're going to die of apoplexy over Aunt Katharine. If she bothered me that much, I simply wouldn't come."

"Of course she doesn't bother you," Frank accused. "You have a good job and you'll have it as long as old what's-his-name lives. He wouldn't give up his indispensable Miss Lathrop if the world were coming to an end tomorrow. So you don't have to worry about antagonizing Aunt Katharine. Now, I — well, as an actor I have a damned up and down life, stony-broke one day, and rolling in Federal lettuce the next. I get pretty fed up sometimes, and the only thing that keeps me going is that old Auntie can't live forever, and I'll inherit a nice plump sum to stall the wolf off until I'm a big success."

"Oh, don't be so selfish!" Kay countered mildly. "You think no one has any feelings but yourself. Do you think I want to spend the rest of my life nursemaiding old what's-his-name, as you call Mr. Hull? It gets pretty tedious keeping track of the dull details he considers himself too important to think of. Sometimes I want to throw his prized crystal inkwell square in his face, but who else would pay me anywhere near what he does?"

"Ha!" Frank pounced, shifting ground. "You admit you're waiting for Aunt Katharine to die, and fawning on her meanwhile, you and Leonard!"

"And if we hope for our inheritance as you hope for yours, dear, is that wrong? Leonard, after all, is rather up against it. With the war over, he's not doing so well. Well-paying engineering jobs aren't so easy to get now."

Leonard, having labored, brought forth a conclusion. "Aunt Katharine is a rule-maker. However, such rules as she makes, she herself obeys with precision. This is the first time I have known her to deviate — barring illness."

Kay and Frank stopped bickering, considered the idea, nodded at Leonard in sudden agreement.

"Well, what do we do now?" asked Frank. "Sick she may be, but if she's not, I don't want to be the one to bother her."

"Neither do I." Kay pondered. "But if she's sick, we have to do something. How about sending Jessie up?"

"Aunt Katharine will fire her if nothing's wrong. You know the law: *no* one's to call her in the morning."

"I will go if you wish," Leonard said calmly. "I am firmly convinced that Aunt Katharine has been taken ill. If not, she will no doubt, being fair if strict, understand my worry at her unusual delay."

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He went up the wide Colonial staircase, while Kay and Frank waited at the bottom. They heard him knock, call Aunt Katharine's name . . . knock and call again . . . try the handle and call more loudly. Then he appeared at the top of the stairway.

"The door is locked as usual, but Aunt Katharine doesn't answer. I think you had better see if Jessie or any of the other servants has a key."

In a few minutes a small disturbed group agitated outside Mrs. MacPherson's door, hesitating to take the final violent step of breaking the door in.

"Come on, Leonard, for God's sake, let's get it over with," Frank snapped. Leonard quibbled; it was one thing to knock on a door after studied reasoning, another to smash it impetuously.

He made a last clutch at caution. "Let's try the windows; maybe one of them is unlocked."

This time it was Kay who spoke sharply. "Really, Leonard, after all these years, you should know Aunt Katharine locks every window as well as the door each night."

Three dull thuds as Frank and Leonard threw their weight upon the heavy, tight-fitting door. At last a wrenching sound as it weakened, and a final crash as the hinges tore loose.

Aunt Katharine might have been asleep, her grey hair pinned into tight curls, her composed, lined face creamed and undisturbed above the smooth, furry blankets — except for the blood. Like red ink dropped on a white blotter, it had crept from somewhere on her left side over the crisp monogrammed pillow-case, the immaculate hemstitched sheets . . .

The elongated sheriff scratched his greying head in sheer bewilderment. The extent of crime in the prim village of Whittlebury, Connecticut, had hitherto ranged from heinous trespass by delinquent cows to reprehensible speeding at 35 miles an hour by irresponsible summer visitors. Murder, frankly, overwhelmed Sheriff Brinley.

Aw, sure, he knew where to begin. "Why should anyone kill Mrs. MacPherson?" Common sense answered: not a sneak thief, because she had no valuable jewels or furs or silver around. Not the help, because the old lady paid them double wages with the understanding they'd get nothing by her will. But those nephews and the niece — they got a nice lot of money now that Mrs. MacPherson was dead.

He puzzled further. Tough to find out which one of them did it. Worse yet, how could he prove how anyone got into the room? The door was not only locked but bolted on the inside. And he himself had unlocked the windows. Sheriff Brinley shrank into himself. Seemed a shame he couldn't figure out *something*, though; he didn't like any better than the next one to admit he couldn't do a job.

He brooded, chewing the inside of his cheek unhappily. An idea came, slipped away, came back again. He peered at it warily, found it good, and went to the telephone, beaming with

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inspiration. If Mr. Riddle couldn't help him, no one could.

The villagers had long ago forgotten that Mr. Riddle had once been their local mystery man. Short, knobby at the joints, with a narrow scalloping of white hair above jutting ears, Mr. Riddle had turned up at the local inn eight or nine years before. He sat and munched his unlit pipe contentedly on the verandah most of the day, never trying to make friends, yet not concealing the interest in his bright blue eyes or the good nature of his wise, pink face.

The village slowly warmed to him, as it seldom did to outsiders, even forgiving him his "big city" accent. Presently he bought a small, down-at-heels house on the square. White paint and floor-wax, glue and nails, plumbing and electricity, and at last a sign: "Mr. Riddle — The Fix-it Man."

He didn't do much business at first. These were people quite capable of fixing their own leaky faucets. But soon they began to stop by his place for sympathetic help on big and little problems, or just to listen with fascination as he talked from an apparently bottomless well of knowledge. They discovered too that he always managed to produce that hard-to-find tractor part. And he could figure things out in a hurry — like the time he saved the postmaster's mare from drowning in her own entangling harness after she'd slipped into the river.

So Mr. Riddle listened carefully to Judd Brinley, and bit his stubby, unlit pipe. Judd regarded him hopefully. Mr. Riddle knew everything.

"Well, now," he grinned at the sheriff, "this oughtn't to be so hard. How many times have you found that when anything looks complicated or impossible, like this locked room, it usually turns out to be extra easy? Like a car that won't go. You fuss over the spark plugs and check the battery and do every other darn thing, and what finally turns out to be wrong? You've run out of gas!"

They went upstairs. In the middle of Mrs. MacPherson's room Mr. Riddle stopped short. He was looking not at the body on the bed with its dreadful stains, but at the wreckage on the bare floor beside the dressing table . . . a litter of broken bottles, smashed jars, dusty powder.

"You shoulda smelled it," said Sheriff Brinley, shaking his head. "When I got here, it was somethin' awful. I had to open the windows before I even looked at the body."

Mr. Riddle knelt to look at the labels on thin glass and thick china . . . cleansing cream, face powder, nail polish remover, facial masque, depilatory. "No wonder," he said. "Acetone in the polish remover, some kind of sulphur in the depilatory — enough to smell up the whole house, let alone one room."

He rose and examined the jars and bottles still intact on the dressing table . . . perfume, skin freshener, body lotion.

"That's like Mrs. MacPherson, isn't it?" he remarked. "She never went in

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for extra trimmings, but she took good care of herself and everything she owned. This isn't an elaborate house, but a lot of time and money went into keeping it nice. And the same with her face — no lipstick or mascara, but a lot of good care."

He turned to the bed. The doctor was waiting a call from the sheriff to take the body for autopsy. Meanwhile, as nearly as Doc could estimate, Mrs. MacPherson had died about four o'clock in the morning. A very sharp knife or blade had made a small cut, clean and accurately placed, at her jugular vein and she had bled to death. The doctor had suggested that if it was done deftly enough and she was sleeping soundly, she might not even have waked up. Mr. Riddle noted the sleeping tablets on the bedside table, and thought it was likely.

Mr. Riddle examined the room. He looked at the door, or what was left of it. Even in its damaged state, he could tell it hadn't been tampered with at hinges or lock. He looked at the chintz-draped, double-hung windows with their shades carefully aligned at center, worked the locks back and forth with sure fingers, noticed the intact panes of glass. He glanced out at the snow. That might have provided a clue, but it had been on the ground for two days and was pockmarked with footprints of occupants, servants, delivery people.

"Too bad," he said. "All those ladder marks would be interesting if Jim Anderson and I hadn't made them ourselves, clearing the snow off the roof yesterday. Mrs. MacPherson didn't change her habits much, but when she made up her mind something should be done, it had to be done right away. That snow, now — it's never done any harm on the roof all the years I've been here. But yesterday she called me, and nothing would do but I must come over instantly and clear it off. It's not very pleasant to think of somebody killing her, though. She was strict and fussy, but there wasn't anything mean about her."

He went down to the living room to talk to the heirs. Various little jobs for Mrs. MacPherson had on occasion brought him into the house on their previous visits, so he already had them summed up. Kay was a super-secretary to Mr. Hull, a vice-president of Stanton's Beer. It was a hard, monotonous job because Mr. Hull was a demon for getting every detail on the records, but rather absent-minded himself. Kay was driven to distraction tracking down all the things he forgot to tell her. But she didn't dare give up the job, knowing that no one else would pay her as much as Mr. Hull did.

Leonard was pursued by unsuccess. He had done moderately well in engineering school, but had been unable to find a job before the war. During the war, of course, he had managed to do better, but now he was once again on the down path. Mr. Riddle wondered if Leonard mightn't have refused jobs because he thought they were beneath him. He could have

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that sort of pride, as well as a desire for luxuries that would prop his ego.

Frank was pretty much the typical young actor, getting a few small parts, living on touches in between, perhaps cashing in more on charm than on more solid virtues.

Mr. Riddle talked to them separately and found they agreed on all facts — not that these were crucial enough to matter. The three of them came up every other weekend, arriving Saturday for lunch, leaving Monday morning. In accordance with Aunt Katharine's unvarying routine, the afternoon was spent in the study reading, talking, knitting. Dinner, as usual, had been served promptly at eight. Afterwards, as usual, they had played bridge until ten. Then, as usual, they had all gone to bed and heard not a sound during the night.

Mr. Riddle, taking Sheriff Brinley with him, settled down in the study to work the problem out. Once again, they went over the situation.

"You're sure, now, Judd, aren't you," pressed Mr. Riddle, "that you unlocked those windows?"

"Couldn't be surer. When I got here, they were all talking about how the doors and windows were locked, and they had to break the door down. And I remember plain as can be turning the locks on both those windows."

"Well, then," said Mr. Riddle cheerfully, "let's think of something else. Those cosmetics — they worry me somehow. I can't see how they were spilled."

The sheriff looked surprised. "Why, maybe Mrs. MacPherson struggled some. Or maybe the murderer just knocked them off by accident."

"If Mrs. MacPherson had struggled that much, there would be some other signs besides just those broken bottles and jars. And an accident —" he stopped thoughtfully. "Now suppose it *wasn't* an accident?" Suddenly, he was out of the room and on his way upstairs.

In Mrs. MacPherson's room he unlocked, raised, and lowered a window, turned the lock again, and shook his head. He did the same with the other window, but this time there was a look of satisfaction on his face. He went to the dressing table and once again eyed the spilled cosmetics, nodding his head thoughtfully.

Going into Kay's room, he found clothes, cosmetics, a memorandum pad with business reminders, and pencils. With Leonard's clothes were two technical books, and a leather case containing a full set of drafting implements. Frank's clothes were augmented by three play manuscripts and a compact make-up kit.

At last he went back to the living room, where the three heirs waited uneasily. He chatted pleasantly for a few minutes. There was a sound of footsteps outside, and Judd entered with a State Trooper who kept his hand on his holster and surveyed the group aggressively. Mr. Riddle's friendly smile disappeared.

"We know who did it," he announced bluntly. The three sat transfixed for a moment. Kay turned a

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little paler, Frank was on edge, Leonard sat stolid as ever while Mr. Riddle continued mildly.

"One thing about my job," he said, "it means I'm in and out of everybody's house, helping them out when things need fixing but when there's some trick to it they can't quite see themselves. This murder I could look at the same way. I started with one little thing that didn't seem right to me, and from that I went on to other things until I finally figured out how the whole thing worked."

"For God's sake, tell us what you're getting at!" Frank erupted.

"The cosmetics bothered me. It was wrong that everything else in that room should be so undisturbed if there had been a struggle. And if they'd been knocked over accidentally, it seemed to me there would have been a loud enough noise to wake somebody. Yet nobody heard a sound all night. So I wondered why they might have been broken *on purpose.*

"What did I find then? Well, I found that the things that had been broken all smelled awful. Perfume and things that had a *pleasant* smell hadn't been touched. Now why were these certain things spilled deliberately? The sheriff himself gave me the answer — he said the room smelled so terrible he opened the windows right away to air it out. That meant *somebody wanted those windows unlocked as soon as possible.*"

"But who? Who?" interrupted Kay.

Mr. Riddle's face was grim as he signalled to Judd. "Just to make sure we don't run into trouble," he said, "you better put those handcuffs on Leonard Lathrop." Leonard hardly moved and his face was without expression.

"Really," he said pedantically, "this is ridiculous. You know nothing about police work and all this theorizing without proof simply shows you up."

"I wouldn't say that, Mr. Lathrop, until you hear the rest of it." Mr. Riddle's polite distaste was very evident.

Frank could hold himself in no longer: "What about those windows? Why did they have to be unlocked?"

"*Because there was something Mr. Lathrop had to hide that wasn't hidden until the windows were opened again.* I didn't think there was much chance of any complicated gadgets having been used, so I looked for something simple. And I found it. On one of the windows, the lock is just a little loose. Unless the window is slammed all the way down, the lock turns all right — but it turns *over* the other piece, instead of catching *into* it. That means the window really wasn't locked at all! Mr. Lathrop wanted it opened before somebody noticed the loose lock. If he hadn't made a mistake in picking his cosmetics, I never would have thought so much about the windows and gone back for a second look."

"Even so, Kay or Frank could have done that as well as I could," Lathrop said coldly. Kay looked stricken at

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his words.

"Why, you —" Frank began.

"Be quiet and let me finish," said Mr. Riddle sharply. "They could have, but one thing more proved they didn't. As soon as I knew someone entered by the window, I knew he had to have a ladder. Now it's impossible to use a ladder without leaving marks, especially on such well-kept lawns and flower beds as Mrs. MacPherson's. And the best way you could think of to make sure no one could check up on ladder marks was to see that there were *plenty of them all around the house.*

"The more I thought about it, the more it tied in with you, Mr. Lathrop," Mr. Riddle went on. "Mrs. MacPherson never had the snow taken off the roof before. Why should she suddenly call me up yesterday afternoon? Because someone took a lot of trouble to make her think it was necessary. She was set in her ways, and it would take convincing arguments. Who of the three of you could reason her into it? An engineer, of course! Somebody who could talk scientifically about the weight of the snow or the damage to the gutters."

Once again, Frank boiled over: "By God, you're right! Leonard was the one who suggested it, and believe me he spoke like a text-book on the subject."

"The final proof," said Mr. Riddle, "is in your own room, Mr. Lathrop. By itself, it doesn't prove much; added to everything else, it ties in. You've got a case of drafting instruments, and among them is a special blade, one almost like a surgeon's knife, and sharp as a razor. It would work better than an ordinary knife, and nobody would think anything about your having it. It may even be that tests will show you haven't cleaned it carefully enough."

Only when the sheriff and the trooper had taken Leonard nearly out the door did he give in. "All right, I killed her! Why should I be a nobody, working at routine jobs all my life, while she lived in luxury with more money than she knew what to do with?" He ended in a flood of abuse, his voice shaking hysterically as he uncurbed the repressions of years.

A couple of days later Mr. Riddle sat on the porch of his little white house-cum-shop, unlit pipe in his teeth. "You know, Judd," he said, "some people need time to think. If Leonard Lathrop had taken time, he'd have realized that we had only circumstantial evidence against him. You see, that was his game from the beginning. He figured that if no one discovered the secret of the locked room, no one could be accused. He didn't mind being under suspicion as long as Kay and Frank were, too. But my finding out so much got him panicky. Frank, for instance — well, he never would have had the patience to plan it that way, but at the end he'd have carried it off better."

"How long do you figure he planned it? As soon as he got here and found there'd been a heavy snow?"

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"Oh, no, Leonard wouldn't rush into anything that fast. Wouldn't surprise me if he'd been planning it as long as a year, working until he'd an almost fool-proof plot, and then waiting till there was a lot of snow on the roof some weekend he was here."

"Yeah, he had a lot to do, looking over what was on Mrs. MacPherson's dressing table, and loosening the lock, and —"

Mr. Riddle interrupted, shaking his head. "He didn't loosen that lock ahead of time. He'd know that Mrs. MacPherson was fussy enough to notice something like that and get it fixed quickly. No, I think he did that no earlier than dinner-time that night, or even while he was dummy during bridge later. He wouldn't take a chance on her finding it while it was early enough for her to call me to fix it. And if you'd given up, as he expected, he'd have managed to tighten it up again before the State got around to its investigation."

The sheriff smiled at Mr. Riddle proudly. "Well, you sure helped me out of a tough spot. I had a good hunch when I figured you could even solve a murder the first time you came up against it."

But if Sheriff Brinley's inward ear had been able to hear Mr. Riddle's inward voice, he would have been wiser. For Mr. Riddle was thinking, "First time, hm? Well, now, I wouldn't exactly say that."

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His name is Davis Dresser; his friends call him Dave; his public calls him Brett Halliday and knows him best as the creator of tough Mike Shayne . . . Brett Halliday was not even fifteen years old when he ran away from home and enlisted in the 5th U. S. Cavalry at Fort Bliss, Texas; then followed more than a year of Border Patrol duty on the Rio Grande, a year back in high school, and three years bumming through the west and southwest, interspersed with work in the wheat fields, construction camps, and oil fields; then engineering school and engineering jobs, until 1930 when Davis Dresser became Brett Halliday and sweated through four solid years of rejections and a couple of million words that came to final rest in wastebaskets.

Michael Shayne was dreamed up in 1935 while "Halliday" was vacationing on the Gunnison River in western Colorado. The first Michael Shayne novel was turned down by twenty-two publishers before Henry Holt & Company took a chance on it in 1939. The second Shayne book was bought by 20th Century Fox and Lloyd Nolan became Mike on the screen; in 1944 Shayne went on the air, thus completing the magic circle and performing the literary hat trick — books, movies, and radio.

There is no doubt that Brett Halliday belongs to the empirical school. He's been through the mill, he knows what the score is, he's got what it takes from personal experience. No ivory towerist, Halliday can write a story about railroad construction, about a four mile gap between a dream and reality, about mesquite and cactus country, Texas deputies, and two white men seeing a job through south of the border, and he can write it the way a man does who knows what it's all about . . .

HUMAN INTEREST STUFF

by BRETT HALLIDAY

You want a human interest story for your paper on the execution tomorrow? A guy is slated for a one-way trip to hell in the electric chair, and all you see in it is a front page story!

That's your business, of course. I never blame a man for doing his job. I've kept my mouth shut up to now for Sam's sake, but he won't mind after the juice is turned on in that little gray room.

You're right. There is a whale of a story that hasn't been told. I guess it's what you'd call human interest stuff, all right.

I'm the only person that can give you the real low-down. Me, and one other. But it's a cinch the other fellow isn't going to talk for publication.

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All right, if you promise to hold it until after they throw the switch tomorrow morning. I wouldn't want Sam to be sore at me for spilling it.

Yeah. There's a gap of five weeks unaccounted for from the time Bully Bronson's murderer crossed the Rio Grande going south until he came back to fry in the hot seat.

A lot of living can be packed into five weeks. A hell of a lot, Mister.

It's funny the way things worked to bring Sam and me together. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but things don't — south of the Border.

I drifted into the railroad construction camp that morning, needing a job bad and not caring what kind.

The American engineer, Hobbs, was down with tropical dysentery and was all set for a trip back to a hospital in the States. He had a young assistant he'd planned to leave in charge of the work, but the youngster was new to Mexico and just the night before I hit camp he had gone on a tear and drunk enough *tequila* to make the mistake of insulting a Mexican girl.

The girl's father drained the cactus juice from his belly and left him in bad shape to take charge of a construction job.

With his fever at 105, Hobbs was in a tight spot when I happened along. They were filling the last gap in a railroad line that was to connect St. Louis with the west coast of Mexico and with the Orient by ship, and the rainy season was due in six weeks.

That meant the fill and culverts had to be in place within six weeks — or else. The last gap was across that valley south of Terlingua, where plenty of water runs down from the mountains during the rainy season.

And there was more to it, really, than just beating the rainy season. The history of the St. Louis, Mexico & Asiatic Railroad goes back a lot of years to a group of men in St. Louis who dreamed of a direct route from their city to the Orient.

They backed their dream with money and started building the S. L. M. & A. from both ends toward the middle. Something happened — they ran out of money, I guess — and got the American end to within a hundred miles of the Border, and the Mexican end about two hundred miles south of the Border.

For forty years, the line was in a receivership and that three hundred mile gap was the difference between a dream and reality.

Just last year, they got money from somewhere and started filling that gap.

Now, it was narrowed to four miles, and you can't blame Hobbs for jumping at any chance to get the grade finished before the rainy season came along and held them up another six months.

Yeah, that's just what he did. He asked me a couple of questions to see if I knew my stuff, then put me in charge.

They took him north in a Ford ambulance at noon, and his assistant died at four o'clock — the Mexican knife having drained more from his

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belly than just the over-dose of *tequila*.

That put it strictly up to me. A job I hadn't been formally introduced to, an all-Mexican crew of two hundred mule-skinners, a four-mile fill with drainage culverts to get in place — and the rainy season to beat.

I sat up all night in Hobbs' tent with a gasoline lantern hanging from the ridge-pole, going over the blue-prints and field books.

We started moving dirt in the morning, and I tried to be all over the job at once.

Mexicans are funny. I'd rather work a job with Mex labor than any other kind, but they do take lots of bossing. The one thing they haven't got is initiative. They'll do anything they're told, and do it well, but they have to be told or they won't do a damn thing.

I was going nuts before the morning was half over. I had a transit set up in the middle of the gap, and a level at each end of the fill that we were working both ways.

Running from one instrument to another; setting a few curve stations with the transit; trotting back to drop in some blue-tops at one end of the fill; then going back to the other end to re-set slope stakes that had been dragged out by careless wheelers — it had me goofy.

With two hundred teams moving dirt all the time, you understand, and I had to keep them moving.

I was standing behind a level, cussing my Mexican rodman who was holding the level rod upside down on a stake, when I heard an American voice behind me:

"You wouldn't be needing a spare engineer, Mister?"

A million dollars wouldn't have sounded as good to me right then. I pushed back my hat and wiped a muddy mixture of sweat and dust from my forehead. The man was sitting a roan mare, looking down at me. He wore white whipcords and a white shirt, but he looked at home in the Texas saddle.

His eyes were blue and there was a flame in them. He didn't blink while I stood there and stared. He was about thirty, and there was red sunburn on his face like a man gets when he comes fresh into the blistering heat south of the Rio Grande.

I couldn't quite figure him out, but I only asked one question: "Can you run a level?"

He stepped off the roan onto the soft fill and came toward me. There was a bulge under his shirt on the left side. I've seen enough shoulder holsters to know what it was.

The way he stepped up to the level, squinted through the telescope and adjusted the focus to his eye was all the answer my question needed.

You can tell just by the way a man walks up to a tripod whether he knows his stuff or not. It's a trick of seeing the position of the three legs and not stepping close enough to any one of them to throw the instrument out of level.

He didn't know the Mexican lingo,

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but you can set grade stakes with arm signals. I gave him the field book showing grade elevations for each station and told him to go to it.

I asked him his name as I started to the other end of the fill.

He gave me a steady look and said: "Just call me Sam."

That was all right with me. I would have called him sweetheart if he'd wanted it that way. I was so damned glad to get some help that I didn't care how many babies he had strangled back in the States.

I took three deep breaths and moved on down the job. Things began to take shape when I had time to study the blueprints and get squared around. With Sam handling one instrument, I felt the job was whipped.

By quitting time that night, everything was going smoothly. I could see it would be a cinch to finish in six weeks if Sam stuck with me.

I told him so after a feed of *frijoles con chile* and *tortillas* that the Mex cook dished up.

We were sitting together in the tent, and Sam nodded. He didn't say anything. He was tired, and the sunburn on his face had deepened to a fiery red. He slouched back on his bunk and seemed to be busy with private thoughts.

I got up and fiddled with the radio, a battery set that Hobbs had left behind. I got it working, and tuned in a news broadcast over a Fort Worth station. The announcer's voice crackled in the quiet that had fallen over camp in the twilight:

"The search for the slayer of Bully Bronson shifts below the Mexican Border tonight. Authorities are convinced that Bronson's assistant engineer, who murdered his chief in cold blood after an argument in a highway construction camp, has slipped through a cordon of officers in the Big Bend section and made his escape across the Rio Grande. This station has been requested by police to broadcast the following description to Mexican authorities who are warned that. . . ."

I reached over and snapped the radio off. Sam was sitting up straight, watching me through slitted eyes. Three buttons of his shirt were open and his right arm was crooked at the elbow, gun-hand where it could go inside his shirt in a hurry.

I said: "To hell with that stuff. Everybody in this part of the country knows Bully Bronson needed killing. I hope they never get the guy that did it."

Sam relaxed a little. He reached in his shirt pocket for a cigarette, drew out an empty pack. I tossed him my makings of Bull Durham and brown papers. He tore two papers and spilled half a sack of tobacco before he got a bulging cigarette rolled and licked.

When he had it burning, he said: "But murder is still murder." He clamped his teeth together, like he was having a hard time keeping from saying too much.

"It's not murder when a guy like Bully Bronson gets bumped," I argued. "Hell, I know fifty men that'll

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sleep easier tonight because Bronson is dead."

"It's murder when a man waits until another is asleep, then blows the top of his head off with a shotgun." Sam's voice was thin and shaky.

"There's a lot of things that go into a killing like that," I told him. "No one will ever know how much the killer took off Bronson before he got up nerve to do the job. And, from what I know of Bronson, I figure it was smart to wait until the old devil was asleep, and then use a shotgun to make sure of doing a good job."

"The law still calls it first degree murder."

I nodded. I was watching his face. "If the law ever gets a chance to say anything about it. If he's across the river, he doesn't have to worry."

"There's such a thing as extradition."

I laughed. "You don't know this country like I do. Extradition is just a big word south of the Rio Grande. What a man has done back in the States doesn't count against him down here. A man leaves his past behind him when he crosses the river."

Sam thought that over, dragging on his brown-paper cigarette. His lips twisted and he asked:

"Can a man ever get away from . . . his past?"

I stood up and yawned. I knew something was going to crack if we kept on along that line. I said:

"Hard work is the best medicine for that kind of thinking. We've got a tough job in front of us here. It's going to take all both of us can do, working together, to put it over."

I turned my back on him to give him time to think it over and get my meaning straight.

There was just enough daylight left to see the end of the railroad fill there in front of camp.

It's an ugly, hard country south of the Big Bend. Nothing will grow in the hot sand except mesquite and cactus, and the only things that can live are lizards and long-eared jackrabbits.

You forget how ugly it is in the darkness. Even the bare thorny mesquite and the spiny cactus plants look friendly.

I remember every little thing as I stood there in the open doorway of the tent waiting for Sam to say something. A mule squealed in the corrals, and some of the Mexicans were singing to a guitar accompaniment.

Did you ever hear Mexicans singing one of their native songs? You've missed something.

Sam's voice was harsh, close to my ear: "The job isn't my lookout."

I pulled a lot of the cool evening air into my lungs. I knew this was the showdown. I had to make Sam see it my way.

"It's my lookout, Sam. I didn't ask for it, but here it is, dumped in my lap. It's up to us to get the fill in place before water starts running down from the hills and washes it out."

He leaned against the upright supporting pole and looked out over the valley.

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I nodded toward the fill. "It's our job, Sam."

There was a twisted funny look on his face. "Engineers are damned fools."

I agreed with him. "They just wouldn't be engineers if they weren't. They'd be ribbon clerks or shoe salesmen."

He laughed, and I know he was thinking about a murdered man across the river:

"Men die and other men run away from the electric chair, but there's always a job to think about."

I turned back into the tent. I knew Sam was going to see me through. I said:

"After we get the grade ready for the track-laying crew will be time enough to talk about other things."

He nodded, came back and sat on his bunk. The twisted look was gone from his face. "I suppose it might help a man . . . to get one more job under his belt."

He took off his shirt, showing a shoulder harness with a .45 automatic in a clip holster.

Neither of us said anything as he unbuckled the harness and hung it over the head of his bunk.

It stayed there until the job was finished.

It wasn't tough, as such jobs go. The usual run of luck you run into on construction work. Rock where you don't expect to find it, and so much sand in the fill that it wouldn't hold a two-to-one slope.

Too much *sotol* in camp on pay nights, grudges settled the Mexican way with knives which left us shorthanded until we could get more teamsters.

Sam was plenty okay. He didn't have an awful lot of experience on dirt work, but he was built out of the stuff that makes engineers. With all the guts in the world, and never trying to get out from under when there was extra work to be done.

Lots of nights those first two weeks we worked until twelve or later under the hot glare of a gasoline lantern, figuring mass diagrams to balance the cut and fill, changing gradients.

Never a word between us about the search for Bully Bronson's murderer — and the radio stayed turned off.

Your mind gets numbed after so long on a rush job that takes everything you've got. There aren't any tomorrows and the yesterdays don't count.

There's only the present — with the heat and the dust, swarms of sandflies, the shouts of teamsters getting their loaded wheelers up the hill, a thick haze rising from the valley with snow-capped mountain peaks showing dimly through it from the southwest, the two ends of a narrow railroad grade creeping toward each other so slowly that you'd swear you were making no progress at all if you didn't have station stakes to tell you different.

Two white men on a job like that are bound to get pretty close, or learn to hate each other's guts.

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During those weeks Sam and I got about as close as two men can ever get. Without words, you understand. Neither of us were the kind to shoot off our mouths.

I quit being the boss after the first couple of days. We were just two engineers pushing a job through.

After it was finished?

Hell, I didn't know.

I didn't waste any time thinking about what would come after it was done. I don't think Sam did, either. See what I mean? The job was the only thing that counted.

No. I suppose you don't understand. You're a newspaper reporter. You've spent a lot of years practicing to get cynical. A job, to you, means something to work at eight hours a day and then forget while you go out sporting.

You asked for human interest stuff. I'm giving it to you even if you don't recognize it.

Five weeks dropped out of the lives of two men while time stood still and a construction job went on.

You're going to snort when I tell you how it ended. You're going to say it doesn't make sense and that men don't act that way.

Maybe it won't make sense to you. Maybe your readers won't believe it.

But it did happen like I'm telling you.

By the end of three weeks I'd forgotten what I'd guessed was his reason for crossing the Border in a hurry. His automatic still hung at the head of his bunk, and neither of us had mentioned Bronson's murderer since that first night.

But you can't get away from a thing like that. It was with us all the time.

Sam was right when he said a man can't leave a thing like murder behind him just by crossing a muddy stream of water.

That's why I got a prickly feeling up my spine one afternoon when I saw two riders pushing up a little cloud of dust in the valley between us and the river.

There was that subconscious sense of fear that had been riding me all the time. The feeling that our luck couldn't possibly hold, that there was bound to be a pay-off.

I was running the last bit of centerline with the transit. Sam was on the far end of the fill, staking out a drainage culvert.

I swung the telescope on the riders half a mile away, and it brought them right up to me.

I knew I had guessed right. They spelled trouble. Slouching in the saddle, wearing dust-stained range clothing with cartridge belts slanting across their middles.

They were headed toward camp and I knew I had to keep them away from Sam if the fill was going to get finished.

I left the transit sitting there, and walked back to camp. The two riders were pulling in close when I stepped inside our tent.

One was a heavy man with a gray mustache. The other was long and lanky with a scar on his cheek. Both carried six-shooters in open holsters,

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and had saddle guns in boots slung beneath their right stirrup leathers.

Cow-country deputies, if I ever saw any.

They pulled up in front of the cook-tent and yelled for the cook. When he came to the door, the heavy one said:

"We heard across the river that you had a new gringo engineer here. Is that right?"

The cook was scared. He bobbed his head, sir: "*Si, si, Senor. Es verdad.*"

The scar jumped up and down on the thin man's face. "Where's he at? We've come to take him back."

I waited to hear what the cook would say. He'd seen me pass by on my way to the tent. But Sam was new on the job, too, and he might send them out to Sam.

He didn't. He pointed to the tent and told them I was inside.

I slid back and got hold of Sam's automatic. It was cocked when I met them at the door.

They didn't take time to get a good look at me. They saw the automatic and reached for their guns.

I was lucky. I got one through the hand and broke the other's shoulder.

Then I called to the cook to bring some rope, and made him tie them up while they cussed a blue streak and told me I couldn't do that to the Texas law.

They were still cussing when I loaded them onto their horses and took them to the nearest town; ten miles south.

A ten-dollar bill is talking-money to a *pueblo* chief of police. They had an *adobe* jail that I hoped would hold together until the job was finished. I knew it would be at least that long before they could get a message across the river and any action on it.

That's the whole truth about that affair — the first time it's been told. Sam didn't have a thing to do with it. He didn't even see the deputies. I told the cook to keep his mouth shut, and I told Sam the two shots he heard were me plugging at a coyote. I don't think he believed me, but he didn't ask any questions.

I know the government kicked up a row over the jailing of the two deputies in Mexico, but it happened just like I've told you. They were out of their own backyard, and they got what they were asking for when they crossed the Border.

The job rocked along. We were getting dirt moved and no one else bothered us.

It's a funny country that way. People don't bother you much. Hell, there have been revolutions begun and ended without ever getting into the newspapers. The Mexicans have a queer way of tending strictly to their own business.

That is, it'll seem queer to an American newspaper man. You make a living sticking your nose into other people's affairs and you wouldn't understand a Mexican's lack of curiosity.

But that's the way they are. It was as though our construction camp was in a vacuum, and we slept and worked

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and ate in that vacuum with no contact with the outside world.

There was a feeling of tension between Sam and me as we began to see the end of the job coming up. We were going to finish a week ahead of schedule, but neither of us was any too happy about it.

When the last wheeler-load was dumped in place on the fill it was going to mark more than just the end of another job. It had been swell going while it lasted, but everything has to end.

I didn't know what Sam was thinking when I'd catch him looking at me queerly those last few days as the two ends of the fill came together, and I didn't want to know.

After that last load was dumped to grade would be time enough to find out what Sam was thinking.

We were going on stolen time and we both knew it. But neither one of us slowed up to make the job last longer. Not even the extra week we might have taken before there was danger of rains.

It's something you can't do much about — the pressure to put a job on through when the end is in sight.

I knew Sam pretty well by that time, better than I've ever known another man, but his private thoughts still remained a secret to me.

I guess no man ever wholly knows what's in another's mind. There's a certain barrier that you can't quite squeeze past. No matter how hard both of you try.

Know what I mean?

You're married, aren't you? All right. Take an honest look at your own thoughts. How well does your wife know them?

Don't kid yourself. Make an honest-to-God checkup on the secrets you keep in your mind from her.

That's what I'm talking about.

There's a part of you that's *you*. Which is probably as close to a definition of the human soul as anyone will ever get.

That's the difference between a man and an animal. You can pretty well figure what an animal will do under a given set of circumstances. Only God ever knows what a man is going to do.

Which pretty well brings us up to the morning Sam and I stood and looked at the completed railroad fill. It was ten o'clock in the morning and the last yard of dirt had been dumped and spread to grade.

Sam had been to the tent, and he came back to see it ended with me. It was in the cards.

All at once, it was over. Teams were standing idle, and the Mexicans were squatting on their heels, sucking on *cigarillos*.

The sun was searing down and there was a heat haze hanging over the valley and everything was pretty much like it had been for weeks — except that our job was done.

The track-laying crew would be coming along with cross-ties and steel. Trains would soon be running on schedule over the grade we had sweated out our guts on, and no one

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would think a damned thing about it.

The job didn't seem so important after all.

I looked at Sam and I saw the same bulge inside his shirt that had been there when he first rode up on a roan mare. He had gone back to the tent to buckle on his .45.

That gave me an idea what to expect, but I still wasn't sure what he had on his mind. I said:

"I don't know why it makes any difference, Sam, but I would have hated to quit before this was finished."

He said: "I know how you feel."

I didn't look at him when I said: "There's other jobs waiting to be done, south of here."

"I know. It's too bad we can't do them together."

"Can't we?" Hell, I was so choked up that's all I could trust myself to say.

Sam wasn't choked up. His voice was clearer, harder, than I had heard it before:

"I'm afraid not. They're still looking for Bronson's murderer across the Rio Grande."

"Do we have to worry about that?"

"Haven't you known all along that it was *my* worry?"

I had, of course. There wasn't any use trying to lie to Sam.

My lips were parched. I wet them with a tongue that felt like a dry sponge.

"What are you figuring on doing, Sam?"

"I've got to go back across the Border where I belong."

Well, there it was. Things had been building toward that ever since he stepped off the roan and took hold of the level.

I had known it was coming all along. Sam was that kind of an hombre.

Enough of an engineer to stay and see the job through, but too much of a man to take the easy way and go on down into the tropics with me, where they don't give a damn how many men you've murdered.

I said: "I'm ready whenever you are. It's been swell knowing you."

And we shook hands.

There, Mister, is your human interest yarn. You know the rest of it. The newspapers gave the story a heavy play when we crossed the Border together. There were headlines about the lone American who had gone into Mexico and brought out Bronson's murderer single-handed.

The feature writers did a lot of guessing about what happened during those five weeks.

Your paper will be the first to carry the straight story.

Am I sore at Sam?

No. Not even when I sit down in that chair tomorrow to pay the price for killing Bronson.

You see, Mister, I know how Sam felt about finishing *his* job. They picked him to go after me because he'd studied engineering in college.

But his real job was with the Texas Rangers.

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"The Mystery of the Chief of Police" in our July 1945 issue was the first of a brand-new series of Professor Poggioli stories written by T. S. Stribling especially for your Editor and for readers of EQMM. "The Mystery of the Sock and the Clock" in our January 1946 issue was the second in the series, and in our July 1946 issue we brought you the third — "The Mystery of the Paper Wad." We do not know what readers think of these new Poggioli cases — unofficially, "The Mystery of the Chief of Police" was rated by professional critics and amateur aficionados as one of the three best original detective short stories published last year. But even if we assume the worst — that some EQMM fans, or many of them, do not care for the latest Poggioli adventures — no one can honestly deny that they have an almost irresistible fascination; that in each instance Mr. Stribling has chosen a decidedly unusual theme and handled it in an unorthodox manner. Whatever your final judgment may have been, you must have been piqued by Mr. Stribling's basic ideas. This provocative characteristic is the product of a more fundamental quality: Mr. Stribling's newest tales are philosophically mature; they are grown-up both in conception and execution. On the truth of that statement your Editor will bet his bottom editorial chip.

For EQMM's first annual contest Mr. Stribling submitted the fourth new Poggioli story — "Count Jalacki Goes Fishing." Another intellectual exercise in detection and deduction, the chronicle of Count Jalacki won a second prize, and beyond saying that, we cannot properly discuss the story until after you have read it. A premature preface would reveal too much of the plot and thus considerably lessen the reader's enjoyment. So, read the story first and we'll have a criminological confab — "the feast of reason and the flow of the soul" — when you have finished . . .

COUNT JALACKI GOES FISHING

by T. S. STRIBLING

BY A TRIVIAL coincidence, Professor Poggioli and I were discussing the extraordinary harmony that reigned in American families of great wealth when my telephone buzzed. As my friend reached for it he was saying that beyond the usual divorces which appeared to be the concomitants of great fortunes, our leading financial families lived together in

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extraordinary peace, never a lawsuit, never a rumor of ill usage, never a . . . here he turned from me to the telephone: "Poggioli speaking. . . . Yes, I am a criminologist, I would hardly say *the* criminologist. . . . What? . . . Are you suggesting that I accept a . . . Who is this speaking?"

A moment later he placed his palm over the transmitter and said to me in surprised *sotto voce*, "She says she is the Countess Everhard-Jalacki!"

I was even more surprised than Poggioli. I asked what she wanted.

"She wants me to apply for the position of private secretary to her father, John Everhard I, at the penthouse of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel."

"Didn't know there were any Everhards at the Ritz-Carlton — thought they all lived on Ocean Drive."

"She does live on Ocean Drive."

"I can't quite figure it," I said. "Why does a daughter who lives in one place engage a private secretary for a great financier who lives in another place? And especially why should she want a criminologist?"

Poggioli lifted a finger to indicate that he would ask the reason. After listening for a half-minute, he said: "She wants her father to have a companion who is highly intelligent and can amuse him. He is old and sick in the Ritz penthouse and needs entertainment. She said my honorarium would be any figure I cared to name."

"Just who is going to pay this honorarium?" I inquired, "the daughter on Ocean Drive, or the father in the penthouse?"

Poggioli made this inquiry with delicacy. He listened another moment, then said the Countess wanted him to call on her at 7525 Ocean Drive before settling the point.

That really amazed me. It settled the point that there was an actual Everhard on the wire telephoning us. Up till now I had vaguely suspected an impostor.

"Well, are you going to take it?" I asked.

"Don't have to now."

I made a gesture. "I know you're not broke. I mean the interest of the situation, the unbelievable . . ."

"I'm not talking about money either. I mean I have already found out enough about her to analyze the problem without having to see her."

I was undone. Poggioli's life is a series of abstract analyses which are maddening to me. I flung at him: "I'm a story writer. I want details. And it wouldn't hurt you to dig up a few details either. It would improve your dry-as-dust lectures on criminology at the Ohio State University!"

Poggioli motioned me to hush, uncovered the transmitter, and said: "Countess, I have a friend — a most polite, tactful, intelligent, entertaining man . . ." He went on and gave me a great build-up. Here the woman said something. Poggioli answered, "No, Countess, I won't be out of the picture. You see, we live together. Anything that happens in your father's penthouse we will naturally discuss. He is a trained observer. . . ." Here he waited for several moments

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and finally concluded, "He will call immediately, Countess. Goodbye."

He turned to me with a droll look on his face. "What she really wanted was not an entertainer, but a criminologist. Now what earthly use would an Everhard have for . . ." He broke off and added, "You are to call at once at the villa on Ocean Drive."

I will not describe the Everhard estate on Tiamara Beach. Everybody has seen it or read about it. Guides haul winter tourists past the magnificent grounds and shout through megaphones the price of the sixty-thousand-dollar bronze gate at its entrance. So I can save myself a description.

I started walking from the gate to the villa with the peculiar penniless feeling which middle-class folk always feel in the presence of great wealth. About halfway I saw a plain smallish woman sitting uneasily in a sun-flooded kiosk. I say "uneasily" because she was peering toward the villa and the beach beyond. I wondered if this were the Countess Jalacki who had come out to watch for me and who happened to be watching in the wrong direction. I called out and asked. The woman glanced about and answered in a quick northern voice, "No, my name's Davis. Have you seen a little boy anywhere around?" I looked about, glad to be of service in such a famous place.

"Where is he likely to be?"

"Over on the beach."

This gave me pause. I wondered if it were hopelessly middle-class to look for things where they were. Probably so. However I ventured to suggest: "If you know where he is why don't you look there?"

"Because this is little Jon's free hour," said Davis, with an ironic twist on the "free."

"I see," I said in a tone that told her I was at sea.

"It's the Count's idea," she explained. "He said little Jon ought to have a free hour to develop independence of character. At first I went with him to keep an eye on him during the free hour. When the Count found out he instructed me to stay in the villa, or here in the kiosk, while little Jon developed independence of character." Her tone told what she thought of this idea.

"Little Jon, I suppose, is the Count's son?"

"No, he's the son of Rosalie's second husband, Lord Rathmore."

Miss Davis (I had decided she was a single woman) had the Northern facility of expressing more by the way she clipped off her words than a Southern person could have said in a week.

"I take it you are little Jon's nurse?"

She said she was.

"Countess Jalacki is expecting me. Am I to go on up to . . .?"

"I don't know whether the Countess is up yet or not."

"She telephoned me."

"She has a telephone by her bed. When she wakes up, thinks of something, she telephones and has it done, then maybe she goes to sleep again."

"Uh . . . does this go on night

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and day?" I asked.

Miss Davis glanced at her wrist watch, then at the sun above the palms. "She's probably up now. You might go ahead."

It turned out that the chatelaine, or possibly the villaine (I really don't know what you would call the mistress of a villa), was up. A maid showed me into a sitting room with a great window overlooking the blue ocean. The Countess sat watching a youngish athletic man, a Newfoundland dog, and a small child on the beach. She turned as I entered.

"You are the man who writes Professor Poggioli's memoirs. I hope you are as clever as he is in analyzing why people do things."

I said I could hardly hope that, but that I had picked up some little tricks of analysis. . . . I saw she was not listening to me but was watching, with a troubled expression, the youngish man on the beach. He was hitting the dog with a roll of newspaper.

"Ercole is trying to break Napoleon from going into the surf after things," she said, explaining her inattention.

"I thought that was what Newfoundland dogs were for," I said.

"M-mm, ye-es, but Ercole says if Napoleon retrieves things out of the water it might encourage little Jon to play in the surf and something might happen to him."

I nodded, "I see that."

"Ercole is a real scientist," a touch of pride was in her voice, "everything he does is . . . *scientific*."

I paused a moment, then began again: "I believe you wanted to see me about a position with your father as his private secretary?"

"Yes, that was Ercole's idea, too."

"Now do you hire me or do you recommend me to your father?"

The Countess hesitated a moment. "I'll have to explain that to you. The relations between my family on one side and my father and my brother John Everhard II on the other are somewhat strained. We are not *au courant* with what they are doing. So Ercole thought if we knew my father's private secretary and he knew us, there would be some connection between our two families. . . ."

I began to sense the drift of things. "But Countess, as your father's private secretary, I couldn't give out . . . ah . . . unauthorized information."

She was annoyed. "Oh, not that sort of information. Just little things — how he is getting on; how he slept. I don't hear anything at all. It would be worth your while . . ."

"Well, that phase of it . . ." I lifted a hand to show that money would not affect my loyalty, but I did wonder how much she would have paid.

At this juncture the youngish athletic man whom I had seen through the window entered the room.

"Ercole," she exclaimed, "I have tried to explain to this man why we want to be on friendly terms with my father's private secretary, but I am afraid he has misunderstood me completely." She introduced me to her

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husband, Count Ercole Jalacki.

The Count was as concise and articulate as his wife was diffuse.

"It's very simple," he said, "the Countess' father is very ill and requires a nurse. But there is almost no communication between his family and ours, so the Countess is in continual suspense and uneasiness about her father. It was my idea, when we learned that he needed a secretary, for us to put in someone who would be friendly toward us and who would keep us informed as to his condition. We would expect to recompense you for any trouble you take on our account."

This was a very reasonable request. I said I would be glad to do that for them, but that I would not expect or desire any pay.

"All we want to know," repeated the Count, "is when father Everhard is feeling well and when he has his attacks."

I asked the nature of Mr. Everhard's trouble. The Count said asthma.

"Oh, asthma," I said, expecting something more serious.

"But he is really very ill," stressed the Count, "and we want to know the exact time father Everhard has his attacks, how long they last, what the physician says causes them, and all such details."

I said that a daughter would naturally want to know such facts about her father and agreed to supply them as best I could. The Count was very pleased at this outcome, but it seemed to me that the Countess appeared uncertain, even disturbed. I decided she must be a woman who constitutionally never knew her own mind. The Count made immediate arrangements for me. He said his man-of-all-work, Mr. Quinn, was waiting for me and would chauffeur me over to the Ritz-Carlton whenever I was ready; "chauffeur" was the Count's own word.

I did not particularly relish this form of dismissal, yet there was something about the Count, a flavor to him, that made me quite willing to part with him with or without courtesy. To my surprise the Countess went along with me to the driveway. She was quite amiable now and as we talked of this and that she asked me a very odd question in a very simple manner. She wanted to know what a person could find out by learning *when* her father had his attacks.

"Why," I said, "how long they last, how severe . . ."

She stopped me. "I know that, of course. I mean . . . what else would he find out?"

I looked at her and wondered if she were quite bright. "What else could there be to find out?"

"I don't know. That's why I am so . . ." She broke off and said very earnestly, "Listen, Professor Poggioli is your friend, isn't he?" I said he was. "You'll see him today?" I reminded her that I lived with him. "Well, listen . . . when you go back home tonight, no matter whether you get the position as father's secretary or

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not, you ask him what else a person could find out by knowing when and how long my father had his spells."

"What else he could find out . . . I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I know you don't. Neither do I. But Professor Poggioli will, and please telephone me his answer."

I promised her I would and then wondered what in the world could be the basis of her anxiety and her question. A few minutes later I was in the car with Quinn, on my way to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Quinn proved talkative and as we motored along he mentioned that the Countess was about to become a mother. I exclaimed:

"Oh, that explains it." He asked me what it explained. I told him the queer question his mistress had asked me and added significantly, "Women in her condition are often very nervous and not themselves."

"I wouldn't put it that way," advised Quinn guardedly. "It's the first one that throws 'em off balance a bit, after that they get used to 'em and carry on all right. I know, Mrs. Quinn has had four."

"So you think the Countess has good reason for being uneasy . . ."

"Oh, no, but what I am saying is, it isn't her baby, because she's had one."

"Then what do you suppose she could have meant?" I asked.

"M-mm, she just wants to know what her husband could find out. You see, the Count is a very bright man, a *very* bright man."

Here Quinn drove along for several minutes in silence. Presently he began giving me the marital history of the Countess, perhaps as a background for the little riddle that confronted us.

"The Count isn't her first husband," he said. "He's her third."

"Why, she doesn't look . . ."

"No, she doesn't. A woman in her position never looks her age, but she is really older than the Count — too many years older for comfort, if you ask me. Little Jon Rathmore is the son of Lord Rathmore, her second husband. Count Jalacki was working in the Everhard laboratories and she met him there right after she had cut loose little Jon's father. So Count Jalacki caught her on the rebound. You see, Lord Rathmore was a playboy. So, of course, the Countess imagined she could be happy with the opposite. All married people imagine that. So she fell for Jalacki because he was not only a worker but a terrific worker . . . still is."

"You don't say!" I exclaimed. For I had the middle-class idea that the sons-in-law of great wealth were always idlers and wastrels.

"Oh, yes, still is. That round stone house you saw a little way up the beach from the villa is his laboratory. He's in it all day long, sometimes all night long. I know — I'm his laboratory assistant and man-of-all-work. Well, what the Countess imagined she wanted when she left Lord Rathmore was a worker. She got one all right — a very brilliant scientist. That's what caused the trouble between the two

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families."

"Jalacki's brilliance?" I asked in surprise.

"That's right. You see, he invented something in the Everhard laboratories before he married the Countess. He wanted credit for it. But these big companies don't give their research men credit for anything.

"Jalacki raised a fuss about it after the Countess became his wife, and she backed him. But her daddy and brother — that is, old man John Everhard I and young John Everhard II — put their feet down; said it was against precedent. They're great for precedent. The upshot was the Countess didn't get any concessions for her husband but she did get the villa, and her daddy and brother are now roughing it in the Ritz-Carlton until they can find suitable quarters elsewhere."

"Must be quite a privation," I said.

"Oh, it is," Quinn assured me, "and the two families don't have anything to do with each other any more."

After Quinn's description of the hardships of living in the Ritz-Carlton, I almost hesitated to work in such primitive surroundings. But I crushed my repugnance, went into the hotel, and had the room clerk telephone the penthouse that an applicant wanted an interview with John Everhard I in regard to a secretarial position. Presently I went up twenty-six stories in a small private elevator.

When I stepped out in the penthouse I met Miss Lemmle. She was the nurse in charge of the invalid and she was the person who really decided whether I would or would not do. After a brief interview she took me into the front "ocean" room, introduced me to her patient, then with a caution that he should not talk left us to convey information to each other in any other way we could. When she had shut the door the thin old man uttered in a wheezy whisper: "Damned bossy nurse!"

"If they weren't like that," I said, "they wouldn't be of any service to us."

"First good word . . . ever heard about her . . . she pay you anything . . . to say that?" He started to laugh but a stoppage interrupted him.

I laughed for him, then asked for some idea of my duties.

"Pretend to . . . read my correspondence . . . when she's in . . . read me the financial news . . . when she's out . . ."

"I see. Miss Lemmle forbids you to read the stock reports?"

He nodded. "Have to . . . hire a bootlegger."

"Not good for you?" I inquired, shortening my sentences after his fashion.

"Certainly it is . . . just her fool idea . . . when market goes up . . . my life goes up with it . . . it falls . . . I fall . . ." He began coughing and strangling hopelessly. Miss Lemmle entered the room, shook her finger at him, said he had talked too

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much. For a few moments she watched his spasm, then said sharply to me that she believed this was one of his attacks. She turned into a small adjoining room, came back with a hypodermic needle, turned up the sleeve of his dressing robe and treated his thin arm. She daubed the place with alcohol, then began to examine a number of scarifications by removing small bandages stuck here and there on his arms and chest. She looked at the scratched areas beneath them.

"This is a puzzling case," she said to me. "Dr. Mitzoff is trying to find out what he is allergic to. These attacks come on at the most irregular intervals. . . ." She shook her head over the scarified places, none of which were inflamed.

A wind was blowing in through the window from the ocean. I looked out over the blue expanse. It was dotted here and there by a sail or a wisp of smoke.

"His trouble might come from some ship in passing," I hazarded, "smoke from coal; dust from some sort of freight."

"That's what Dr. Mitzoff is trying to find out," said the nurse.

When I left the hotel I took a bus up Ocean Drive to report to the Jalackis. The Countess received me and immediately asked me what Professor Poggioli had said. I told her I hadn't seen Poggioli, that I had dropped by to report that her father had had an attack of his trouble.

"Oh, yes," she answered vaguely. "Was it bad?"

"I don't know how it compared with the rest of them, but it wasn't good."

Just then Count Jalacki entered the room. When he saw me he burst out: "Father Everhard has had an attack!" I said he had and the Countess asked him how he knew. "Because the man has come back so soon," explained the Count a little impatiently; then he turned to me. "When did it happen?"

"Why," I said, "it has just happened. I came on here at once."

The Count gave me the look of an expert who has the misfortune to deal with a numbskull. "You didn't notice precisely when his attack began?"

"Well . . . about an hour . . . or an hour and a half ago."

The Count's lean face was really impassive but somehow he conveyed to me his satiric contempt for a man who was engaged to make a report on a case and who would say that it happened about an hour or an hour and a half ago. The Countess felt it too for she asked in a suspicious tone, "What difference does it make?"

"A report is accurate or it isn't accurate, Rosalie."

He made me feel so uncomfortable that I told him I would try to be more exact in the future. As I took my leave the Countess said in a significant voice: "Now don't forget *my* question and telephone me."

Count Jalacki glanced at her. "What was your question, Rosalie?"

The Countess hesitated, then said, "I wanted to know if my father was gaining or losing weight."

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"Yes, you'd be interested in that; specific physical details always catch your attention, Rosalie." The Count's voice was level and unstressed; whether he believed her or whether he was privately accusing her of fabrication, I was not sure, but I did know that she was on tenterhooks when he was around.

An hour later I recounted to Poggioli, as best I could, our odd and rather puzzling colloquy. I asked Poggioli why the Countess had tried to deceive the Count, and back of that why had she been suspicious of his inquiry into her father's illness. And, since she was suspicious, did Jalacki's inquiry as to the precise minute of old John Everhard's attacks confirm in any way Rosalie's suspicions.

Poggioli pondered these vague questions and said he could see no possible connection between the wife's suspicious attitude and her husband's questions. Jalacki, evidently, was a technical man who normally dealt in measurements of extreme delicacy, both of time and space, and the wife, soured on her husband, construed every word he uttered, every movement he made, into something inimical to her and her family.

"She's about to become a mother," I told him.

"Oh, well now, that's it."

"But it isn't her first child," I added, remembering Quinn's observations on that point.

"If she suspected her husband before her present condition, she would be a great deal more doubtful of him now. His simplest inquiry she would translate into a threat. You know yourself that Jalacki can't make any improper use of the precise time of old Mr. Everhard's asthmatic attacks. That's impossible."

I immediately telephoned Poggioli's judgment on the point to the Countess. I wanted to ease her mind if possible. But instead of soothing her she became even more incoherent. She told me with a kind of pride in her voice that her husband was a very brilliant and practical man, that he never asked useless questions, that he used his knowledge, always. After an excited pause she added that if she found out anything more she would report it to me and that I should report it to Poggioli; that he, Professor Poggioli, was the only hope she had.

For the next few days I went regularly to the Ritz-Carlton penthouse and bootlegged market information to old John Everhard I. I hit on a plan of memorizing the financial reports and repeating them to the old man as a part of our conversation instead of reading them from the papers. This ruse apparently circumvented Miss Lemmle. I must say I became quite fond of my employer. The influence which the rise and fall of the market had upon our patient amused me and at the same time touched my sympathy. It was not his reason that caused his spirits to go up with the market and fall with it; it was the habit of a lifetime. One morning he told me that he expected some day to pass out on a

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bear market. I warned him seriously f he didn't change his mental attiude he probably would. He seemed lisappointed in my reply and told me I was talking like Miss Lemmle.

This was our status when one morning Miss Lemmle met me at the elevator door as I entered the penthouse. Very solemnly she asked me to step into her kitchen for a moment. I thought: "She's found out I repeat the stock reports to the old man."

Her kitchen was where she cooked her patient's special food, prepared his medicine, and kept her records and charts. She looked at me with the severity of a schoolmistress eyeing a small boy, and requested me to glance around the room. I glanced around the room, then back at her, a little amused and curious. Then suddenly she began asking me questions; where had I been last night, whom had I seen, when had I got home, how did I go home, from where had I started home? She was evidently giving me the third degree to the best of her ability and every moment I expected her to fling in, "Do you read the market reports to Mr. Everhard?" If she had asked that I would have denied it. Because I knew the old man couldn't last long. I knew I was giving him the last bit of pleasure he would get in this world. But to my surprise the nurse never mentioned financial reports at all. Presently she opened her kitchen door and admitted me to the patient in the "ocean" room.

As soon as I was alone with the old man, I asked him why Miss Lemmle had given me the third degree. The old fellow was amused into a wheezing and coughing fit, but finally explained that on the preceding night somebody had entered the penthouse kitchen. Today, he said, Miss Lemmle was grilling everybody indiscriminately — bell hops, night clerks, everybody — trying to find out who it was.

"What did the thief take?" I asked. "That ought to give some clue."

"That's the point," gasped the old financier, "that's why she . . . suspects anybody and everybody . . . he didn't take anything."

I was astonished. "How does she know there was anybody . . .?"

"She saw him . . . standing in the kitchen . . . standing and writing . . . that's why she has to get at him with questions . . . nothing on him she can identify."

"Why, that's the most extraordinary . . . what object could he have in *writing*?"

"That's what she's going to ask him . . . if she catches him."

"How did he get away?"

"He jumped out the window . . . by time she got out on the roof . . . he was gone . . . don't know where . . . elevator house . . . over the roof wall . . . into a top story window . . . don't know where."

"Has she checked on what guests were in the top story last night?"

"My son . . . his family . . . occupy the whole . . . top story."

Well, that was the set-up. When I went home that noon I asked Poggioli what he could possibly deduce

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from a burglar entering a nurse's kitchen and making notes in it, but taking nothing.

Poggioli waggled a finger at me. "One single criminal clue is like a geometrical line; it establishes a direction but doesn't locate a point. Two clues, if they are related to the same crime, should define the crime, or the intended crime, fairly accurately."

"*Intended* crime?" I repeated.

"An intruder doesn't enter a house and make notes without an object. The object must be illegal, or at least objectionable to the owner of the house, and most probably criminal, for a man to risk his liberty merely to get some notes."

I became seriously concerned for my employer. I said, "Look here Poggioli, if somebody is plotting against old man Everhard you've got to figure it out in advance and stop him in time."

"My dear fellow," said Poggioli gravely, "you have put your finger on a sore spot in modern criminology. As now practised, it isn't a *preventive* science; it is a *retributive* science. It is organized to pursue and punish the criminal *after* the fact, but it has no comprehensive machinery either to halt or to punish the criminal *before* the fact. In short, the fact in modern criminology is always a material thing — the accomplished crime; whereas the fact should be a *psychological* thing — the intended crime. Until we develop such a technique, with appropriate treatment for proved criminals, we are no more than barbarians."

"That's all very well," I said, quit out of patience, "that will be fin talk for some future time, but wha are you going to do now with burglar breaking into old man Everhard' kitchen and taking notes?"

Poggioli made a soothing gesture "I just explained to you that one line cannot locate a point, nor one clue a crime. If we are fortunate we will get another line, another clue; where those two lines cross will establish the location, personnel and magnitude of the intended crime. We must be on the alert and recognize this second clue when it . . ." He was interrupted by a buzz from my telephone.

I picked it up and the voice of Countess Jalacki asked if Professor Poggioli were in my apartment. I said he was and asked what new thing had happened to her. She asked in a rush would Poggioli please come over at once. Her husband, his man Quinn, and her little son Jon Everhard Rathmore had gone fishing.

"But listen, Countess," I reasoned with her, "is that why you want Poggioli to come to your villa — *because your husband has gone fishing?*"

"Yes, yes, it is," implored the woman. "I want him to reason out for me what Ercole means, what he intends to do, before it's too late!"

"You mean you think he is up to something because he went fishing?"

"I know it! Never before in all his life has he gone fishing! Always he works, no matter who comes or who goes, he works in his laboratory! Now he has gone fishing!"

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As little sense as this made, her excitement was so contagious it infected me. I stopped the transmitter with my palm and rather nervously explained this absurd thing to Poggioli. I finished by saying, "Of course, it's her condition. What she says makes no sense at all."

"What she says is as rational as for a burglar to break into a kitchen and make notes," observed Poggioli.

"But what connection can a note-making burglar possibly have with Count Jalacki going fishing?"

"If I knew I wouldn't have to call on the Countess Jalacki to find out. But don't you think it is very probable that they are connected? Look at the situation. Two branches of the same family, which are at loggerheads with each other, have two seemingly irrational incidents happen to them at about the same time. Doesn't that suggest a connection?"

Poggioli and I locked the apartment, went out into the street, hailed a taxi, and set out for the Everhard villa on Ocean Drive.

When we reached the villa the Countess Jalacki proved of little help in reading the riddle she had posed. Poggioli talked with her, as diplomatically as he could, trying to obtain some reason why her husband's fishing trip should disturb her, but he got none. At last he was about to return to our apartment when the mistress of the villa bestirred herself to keep him with her. She insisted that we look at her paintings, then at her antiques — in fact, we did the same sort of tourist's tour inside her villa that the Tiamara guides conducted outside. And every time we passed a clock in any of the rooms the Countess glanced at it nervously. Finally the villa ran out. There wasn't anything more to show. And our hostess suddenly thought of the Count's laboratory and insisted that we see it. By this time both Poggioli and I had become curious to know what the Countess was waiting for, so we went with her.

The laboratory was a round stone building a short distance up the beach from the villa. It was simply a chemical research laboratory and held much paraphernalia whose use I did not know. What did interest me were some charts on the wall. One was a graph of the Wall Street stock and bond market. From the graph I could see the market was in the midst of a relative depression. Then there was a detailed government meteorological report giving wind direction and velocity hour by hour, and finally a government survey of the district of Tiamara showing the bay, the city, and the keys or islands strung along the coast. Jalacki had marked in red the distances of these keys from a point on Tiamara Beach. And there was one list on the wall of irregular dates. I will not say it was a puzzling list, because I had no reason to puzzle over it. It was simply an unknown quantity. The whole set-up seemed to be that of a chemical research man who had become interested in meteorology as a hobby. And I was just thinking how unfortunate it was for

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humanity as a whole when a skillful research man like Count Jalacki obtained enough money through marriage to stop real creative work and take up play, even if it were highly scientific play with meteorology, when I was jerked out of my reflections by a scream from the Countess. I whirled and saw Count Jalacki, his man Quinn, and the little boy in the doorway. The next moment I realized the Countess' scream had not been from fear but from joy. She ran to her little boy, Jon, knelt beside him and caught him to her bosom. She was telling the child that he must never leave his mother again and in the midst of this was asking if he had caught any fish. The little boy answered that he had brought back some shells and corals for his grandfather and pulled around a small collector's bag to show his mother.

"Why, that's lovely, darling, that's sweet of you," praised the mother, exaggerating the importance of the shells as one does a child's gift. Here the Count interposed to say that he and Quinn had brought along some sea fans and sea anemone which he would add to little Jon's collection to form a little aquarium to interest and amuse Mr. Everhard during his confinement, "And", he added in a significant tone, "I thought it might also serve as a little peace offering."

The Countess was touched. She said, "Ercole, that is sweet of you." And then pressing the little boy to her side she started joyfully to the villa.

The only interpretation I could place on this scene and the Countess' previous nervousness was that she had been desperately uneasy about her little boy. Why she wanted to have Poggioli on hand when the fishing party returned, I did not quite know. Possibly if the child had not returned she wanted Poggioli to be present to question the men . . . but this explanation was so unnatural, not to say fantastic, that I discarded it.

Count Jalacki watched his wife and her child disappear with a faint quirk of cynical amusement on his otherwise impassive face. He said to Poggioli: "The father of that little boy, so I've been told, was simply a spendthrift of time and money, yet the Countess is utterly wrapped up in his child."

"It's her child," I interposed, "as well as his."

"Rosalie's part in the child would hardly validate its sire," observed the Count drily; then he dropped me from the conversation and turned to Poggioli with the eagerness of a brilliant lonely man who has not met an intellectual equal for a long time.

He explained his maps. They were of the waters around Tiamara. He was interested in tropical sea life and had gone out that morning for specimens. He meant to experiment in his laboratory to see if he could turn them to some commercial use. He explained with a touch of self-mockery that in his youth he had hoped to devote his life to pure science but now that he had come to America he was looking for financial returns.

His talk then returned to the Countess and her little son. He said of course

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he Countess was emotional and irrational about her child.

He went on to decry American lemocracy as being imbued with femnism and sentimentality. If we were o hold our land, he said, against the ompetition of other countries and peoples, our psychology would have to become hard, efficient, rational and nasculine.

Naturally I had heard that talk before, many times before, but it struck me that if he spouted off such doctrines before the Countess she wouldn't take them as indifferently as I, and that she might easily be disturbed about her little son. So at this point the whole trivial mystery posed by the Countess became clear to me, and I dismissed the matter from my mind.

Poggioli and I were now ready to go home. Count Jalacki went with us to the villa where we said good-bye to the Countess. Amidst our leave-taking the Countess asked us if we were driving home by way of the Ritz-Carlton, would we deliver little Jon's present to his grandfather. All we would have to do, she explained, was to hand the little collection to the footman at the hotel door. Naturally we were glad to do this and eventually delivered the peace-making gift at the entrance of the Ritz-Carlton, then taxied on home.

As we drove along I observed Poggioli was writing something in his notebook.

"What are you writing?" I asked.

He said he was copying down the list of dates on the laboratory wall which he had read over and memorized.

"A list of dates!" I ejaculated. "Did you actually memorize a list of ——"

Poggioli ticked off something on his fingers and put down another date. "I have a mnemonic system that makes this sort of thing fairly easy."

"But what object can you have in copying a list of dates?"

"He didn't explain this list." Poggioli counted on his fingers and wrote in another date. "But I know from Jalacki's mental make-up that these dates must perform some function."

I watched him with continued curiosity, touched with amusement.

"All right," I agreed, "suppose they do hang together somehow with wind velocities and wind directions and the local geographical distances of the different keys in Tiamara Bay, I still don't see why you are interested in a column of bald dates."

"My basic reason," said Poggioli, "is because Jalacki lied to his wife. I know it is quite usual for men to lie to their wives, but they seldom or never lie on points unimportant to . . . "

I was amazed. "Count Jalacki lied?"

"That child's collection of shells and coral and whatnot . . . Do you imagine a child of that age would ever have dreamed of giving a collection of anything to his grandfather? It's absurd. I know the suggestion didn't come from the child. It must have come from the Count. So . . . *why?*"

"Possibly it is the Count's peace offering to his father-in-law," I suggested.

"He would hardly have deceived

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his wife on that point," said the psychologist. "The Countess would have been far more pleased to know her husband was trying to make friends with her father than for her little son to have sent him a present. No, there is a logical hiatus in there. The Count has some motive which fits in and explains this situation perfectly. He makes a gift, a marine collection, and on the walls of his laboratory are charts of the bay, weather reports, a graph of the Wall Street stock market . . . and these dates."

I almost smiled: "That's why you memorized them?"

He made no answer to this but continued remembering and jotting down more figures until our taxi reached home.

In my library Poggioli took my nautical almanac and began studying it. I must say I was more interested in his method than I was in his particular problem. As a matter of fact, I didn't believe he had a real problem. He had simply exaggerated a friendly peace offering of Jalacki to his father-in-law into a chimera of suspicion which had no foundation in fact. I became more sure of this when the criminologist turned and said to me in an odd voice: "These dates are the exact hour and minute of the low tides in Tiamara Bay."

"Exactly," I agreed. "Count Jalacki is interested in sea life."

"Certainly. But these dates are very irregular. They skip days, then a month, then a week or two, then a half dozen days . . . You see, there is some *controlling factor* in here that we know nothing about."

I really was amused. "Poggioli, it's irregular because it is Jalacki's hobby. He took time off only when he could — the way a business man plays golf."

My friend made an impatient gesture. "That man never made hit-and-miss observations in all his life. He's naturally thorough in everything he does. Let me see, do you happen to have the government weather reports for these dates?"

I had them and produced them, and Poggioli began studying the weather reports for the dates on his list. Finally he straightened up, wriggled his shoulders to get a kink out of his back, then said to me in an odd voice:

"This is not a hit-and-miss list! It is a complete list of the low tides in Tiamara Bay *when the wind lay East Southeast!*"

"Every one?" I asked.

"Certainly, certainly, every one. . . . Now, Jalacki couldn't possibly have chosen an arbitrary wind. The East Southeast wind must have done something . . . maybe Jalacki didn't make this list, maybe he determined something from the list. . . . You see, don't you, how we may have been trying to work this problem backwards — trying to find out how Jalacki made his list when in reality Jalacki received the list from some source and simply used it as data, just as I am doing now, to solve some problem of his own."

Well, when Poggioli said this, a queer — I might say, a fantastic — notion flickered through my mind. "Look here, Poggioli. Do you suppose

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could have any connection with at burglar writing in Miss Lemmle's tchen? Could the burglar have been ›pying the nurse's report on old man verhard's attacks of asthma . . . ou know . . . their dates?"

I hardly knew what this would sig-ify. It was just a shadowy suspicion ·ith still more shadowy connections ı my mind, but to Poggioli it must ave cleared up the whole riddle. He ave an exclamation, whirled to the elephone, asked me for old John Everhard's number. I gave it. He ialled, waited, then dialled again. No response. Then he turned to the irectory, got the number of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and twirled that. Somebody answered and Poggioli aid hurriedly: "I've dialled the rivate telephone in the Everhard enthouse and get no response. Will you see if it's in order?"

I heard the voice of a clerk say in a pinched metallic tone: "The penthouse wire is purposely cut out. The penthouse wishes to avoid curiosity and sympathy calls. Mr. John Everhard I died of a sudden attack of asthma an hour ago."

Poggioli leaped up from his chair. He made a nervous gesture for me to follow him. As we went outside I asked him what it meant.

"The most calculated, cold-blooded murder! Here's a cab!"

We had some trouble at the Ritz getting to see the younger Mr. Everhard, but at last we entered a lift and shot upwards. A tall dark man with a banker's gravity met us at the door. Poggioli came at once to his point.

"Mr. Everhard," he said, "I have reason to believe your father came to an unnatural death. I am a criminologist by profession, I have come to place myself at your service."

The financier remained apparently calm. He indicated chairs and asked Poggioli to go on.

"Before I proceed, will you get me Miss Lemmle's report on your father's illness. If it is identical with the list I brought with me, my case is proved."

Mr. Everhard sent a man up for Miss Lemmle's chart. When he came down with it I looked over Poggioli's shoulder and managed to see that the first two entries on each list were the same. Poggioli showed the two complete records to the financier.

"The explanation is clear," he said. "Count Jalacki obtained this chart from your father's penthouse — he was the intruder. He studied it and found out that your father's attacks occured at irregular intervals — *but always at low tide when the wind direction was East Southeast.* This gave him the direction of the island that contained the specific material to which your father was allergic. Since it was always at low tide he knew that material lay exposed at the water's edge, probably on reefs. By calculating the wind velocities he knew the approximate distance of the key. When Jalacki obtained this data, he took a boat, went out to the key at low tide, collected shells, corals, sea growth and whatnot. Then he arranged them in an aquarium and sent them as a pretended gift from little Jon Everhard Rathmore. The aquarium contained

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exactly the material to which your father was allergic. It brought on the last violent attack which ended in your father's death. That is what I have to tell you, and I stand ready to repeat it before a court of law — although I cannot guarantee that the nature of my evidence will secure a conviction."

The financier remained impassive. Then he asked: "Why did Jalacki do all this when my father would have probably died inside a few months at best?"

"I cannot be sure. It may have been simple revenge but I noticed a graph of the stock and bond market in Jalacki's laboratory. It forecast an inflation of values. Possibly Jalacki murdered your father now so his estate would be assessed for tax purposes at a low value, and later the administrator would be able to pay off the death dues by the sale of stocks at advanced prices. Such a maneuver would be in accord with his psychology."

Mr. John Everhard II listened to all this, then explained impassively that it was the policy of the Everhard Company never to permit legal action between its members. "Such an action would reflect on the standin of our company," explained the capi talist, "and the standing of ou company is more important than ret ribution, Mr. Poggioli. In fact, it i more important than the lives of an of our personnel. But you must knov I am deeply grateful for your offer.'

Poggioli made a brief bow and saic if Mr. Everhard desired his testimony inside the Everhard corporation, he Poggioli, would still be at his service

He was interrupted in this speech by the telephone. Mr. Everhard went to it, listened a moment, then said:

"Yes . . . yes . . . Will you please express my sympathy to my sister, Rosalie? . . . Thank you." He replaced the instrument and pressed a button on his desk. A young man appeared at an inner door. The financier said: "Henry, will you tell my wife, as tactfully as you can, that our little nephew, Jon Everhard Rathmore, has just been found dead in the surf at our old home on Ocean Drive, through accidental drowning."

I stared at Poggioli. For the first time in our long association, I saw a look of real fear — almost terror — in his eyes. . . .

UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

The last thing you learned in "Count Jalacki Goes Fishing" was the announcement that the child, Jon Everhard Rathmore, had been found dead in the surf — accidentally drowned. When your Editor first read the end of the story in manuscript, he interpreted the death of the child as the second step in Count Jalacki's plan — the second movement, so to speak, in a symphony of crime. Or, to put it another way, Count Jalacki's full plan of murder was not yet complete.

Mr. Stribling ended his story at its most dramatic point — *while the*

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larger crime was still unfinished. As you know now, Count Jalacki murdered his father-in-law so that his wife, the Countess, would inherit her share of the millions; then the Count scientifically murdered his step-son — "accidental" drowning — thus removing another obstacle from his path. Only one more obstacle lies between the Count and the successful culmination of his plot, and that one remaining obstacle is his wife. So, unquestionably, the Countess will also be "scientifically" murdered — that is why a look of real fear, almost terror, was born in Poggioli's eyes: for the first time in his career Poggioli feels utterly powerless; for the first time in his career Poggioli realizes the terrible futility of a priori *detection.*

In his later correspondence with your Editor, Mr. Stribling expressed this "unfinished state" in an unusual way. It's worth quoting. "The final scene in 'Count Jalacki Goes Fishing' (wrote Mr. Stribling) breaks away from the main theme and ends on a splinter of the main narrative. It isn't conclusive, it starts another flight of birds. However, there is a certain pleasure in this ending — you might call it a 'phoenix' ending; as in the legend of the phoenix, it suggests eternal life to the reader. The story implies that the wave of life goes on and on and on. It is the art form of the frieze, not of the easel picture." That, we submit, is an interesting and imaginative insight into Mr. Stribling's mental processes.

But to get back to the problem at hand: after Mr. Stribling and your Editor agreed on the dramatic force of an unfinished ending, your Editor then made the inevitable suggestion that Mr. Stribling proceed to finish the prizewinning story — that is, write a sequel to "Count Jalacki Goes Fishing." By this time Mr. Stribling had caught our personal enthusiasm; by this time he too wanted to know what events would be laid bare by the second flight of birds, by the resurrection of the phoenix . . .

So shortly after we accepted "Count Jalacki Goes Fishing," another manuscript dropped bird-like on our desk and like the phoenix it is "bright-colored" and of "gorgeous plumage." The sequel is titled "A Note to Count Jalacki," and this time — but, wait: we'll not say another word. Mr. Stribling's unfinished story will be finished in the very next issue of EQMM. Watch for it . . .

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Sec. Robert Patterson
Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer
John L. Lewis
Sen. Robert A. Taft

THE INTERVIEWERS

A few of the top-flight newsmen who have appeared:

Ernest K. Lindley, *Newsweek*
Marquis Childs, *United Features*
Edgar Ansel Mowrer, *Press Alliance*
James Reston, *N. Y. Times*
Harold Ward, *Associated Press*
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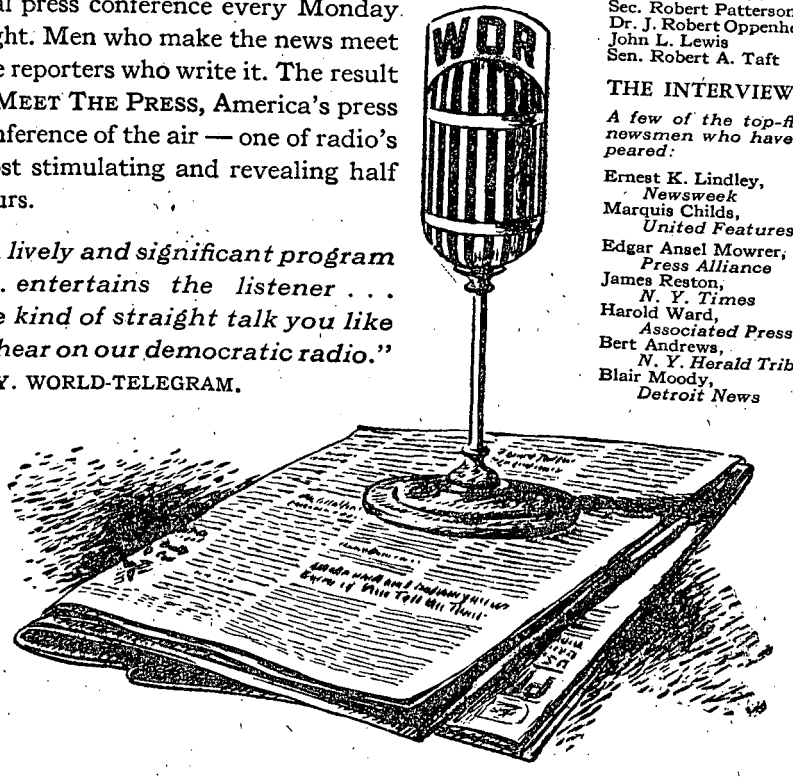

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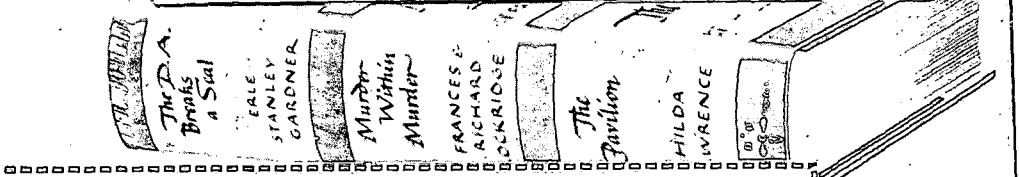

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